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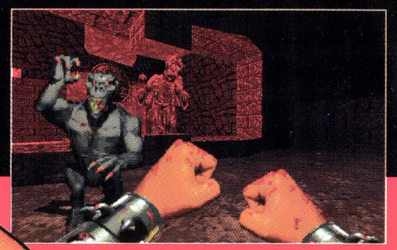

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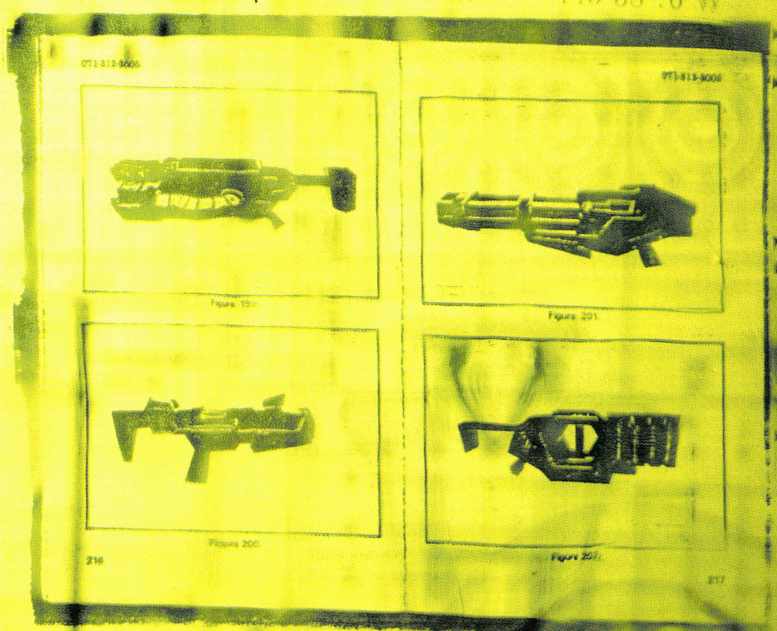
19:42 You learn the hard way in the outer sectors... Like never get into a drinking match with a three-headed Bukan. Never assume a Strogg is dead even when he's nothing but bloody scraps of shrapnel. And never go to bed with a Rabaul no matter how many breasts she has.

19:11

THE LINE BETWEEN MAN AND MACHINE SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN ERASED.

Blood vessels and wires should never have been crossed. Souls and circuitry, brain stems and processors.



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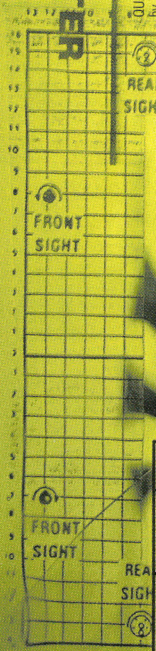
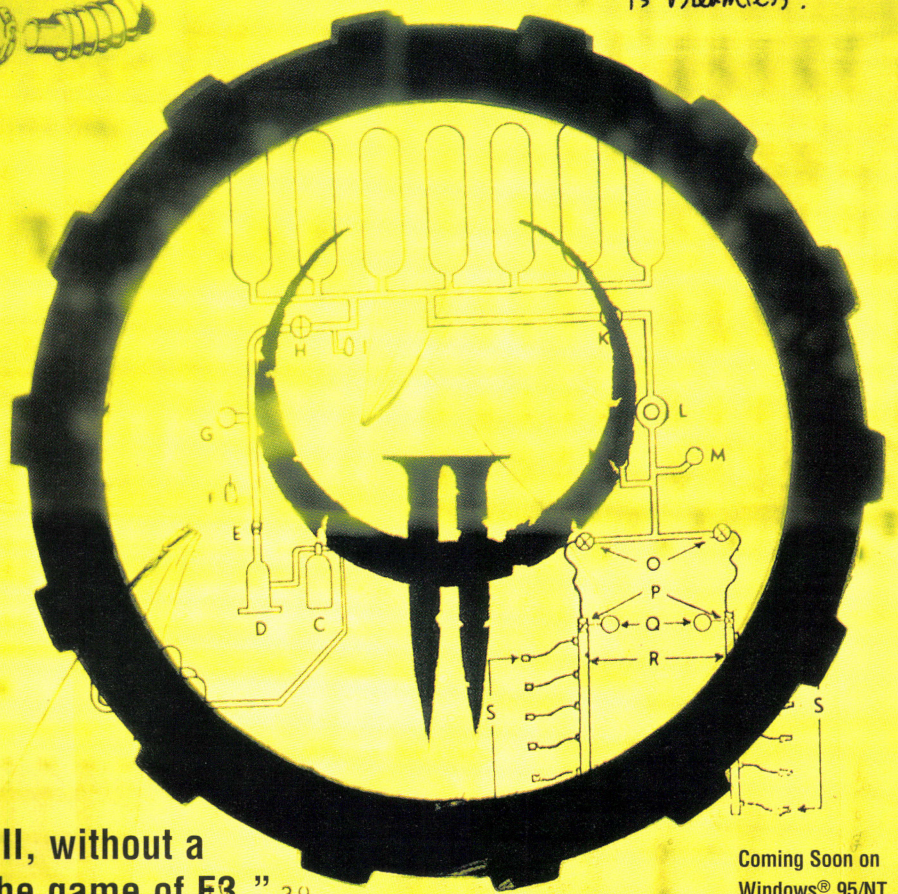


18:03 Grotesque images of Strogg have been filling my sleep at night. Their metallic spines jutting awkwardly through muscle, skin and connective tissue, masks of human facial skin smeared and bonded to their cyber-alloy heads, crude but powerful weapons jammed into oozing, gaping sockets. Thank God the endless sleep ahead is dreamless.

17:05 It's either us or them this time. We lose, and we all end up bratwurst in the grill of some unholy mechanized carnivore. We win, and the Tenan Coalition of Man can start rebuilding the cities on Mars, Olympus, even Earth. Who knows - they might even get the old interplanetary football league going again. God, I miss Monday Night Football.



"Quake II, without a doubt, the game of E3." 39
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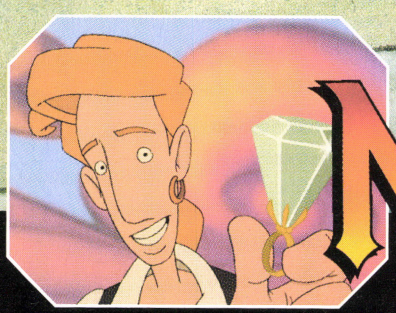

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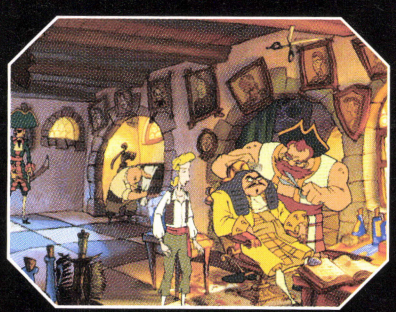

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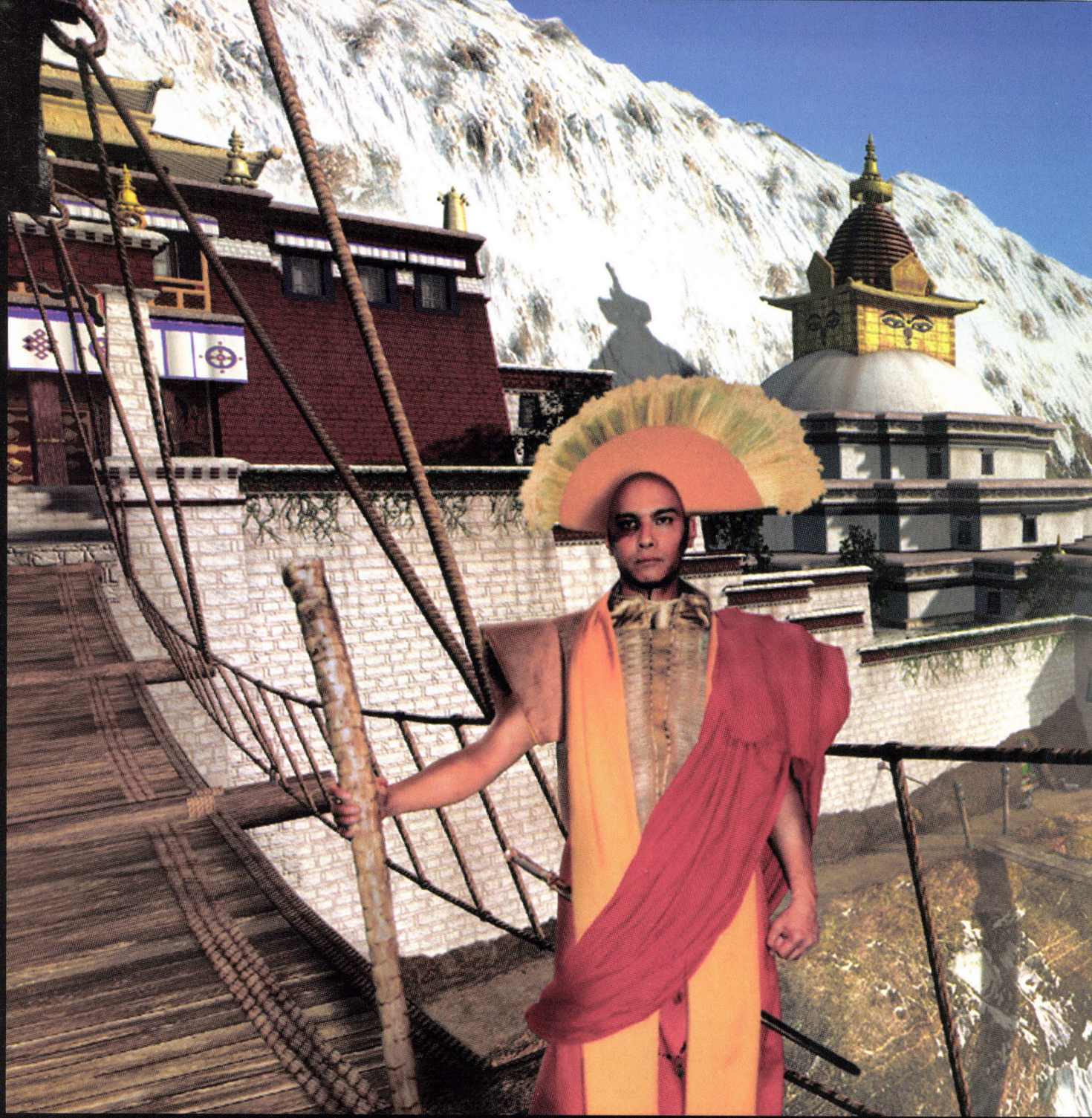

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VOLUME 4, NUMBER 10

What's Inside

PC Games Online has joined with Happy Puppy and Games Domain to provide even more great gaming coverage! For more details, see www.pcgames.com.

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HAPPY PUPPY GAMES

GamesDomain

Jedi Knight P.128

Hexen II P.138

FEATURES

STRATEGIES OF THE SEASON

72 Cracking the Holiday Games: The Designers' Tips

By Corey Cohen and Rob Smith

No screwing around this time, folks—we went right to the source. Who knows better how to conquer this season's coolest games than the people who made them? Here's part one of a multi-month look at the way the developers play.

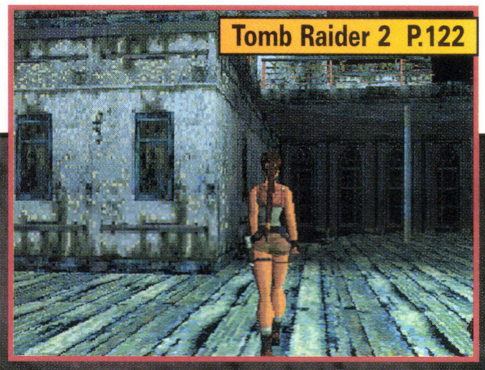
72 Starfleet Academy
77 Hexen II
80 Postal
80 Take No Prisoners
82 Jedi Knight

WHAT YOU NEED

98 Holiday Gift Guide

By Daniel Morris

'Tis the season to get the coolest new play stuff. But how can you tell the games without a scorecard? By reading our indispensible guide to what should land under your tree, bush, or wherever your presents get dumped.



Connecting Gamers to Games

SNEAK PEEKS

122 Tomb Raider 2

REVIEWS

GAME OF THE MONTH
128 Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II

ACTION
132 Postal
135 Shadows of the Empire
136 Take No Prisoners
138 Hexen II
142 Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain

ADVENTURE
145 Galapagos
147 Byzantine: The Betrayal
148 Riven

ARCADE
152 Claw

FLY AND DRIVE
154 Microsoft Flight Simulator '98
159 iF-16
160 iF-22

ONLINE
163 Warbirds 2.0

SPORTS
168 Monday Night Football '98
171 Baseball Mogul, NHL Open Ice

STRATEGY
172 Incubation
176 Dark Reign
179 Total Annihilation
182 7th Legion
184 Age of Empires
186 The Tone Rebellion
188 Entrepreneur

GAME SHORTS
189 Magic: The Gathering: Spells of the Ancients
190 Virtua Fighter 2
191 Virtual Pool 2
192 Achtung Spitfire!, Need for Speed II: SE
193 Manx TT Super Bike

DEPARTMENTS

12 EDITOR'S NOTE
Steve Klett

16 PC GAMES.EXE

27 PC GAMES.COM

31 INCOMING!

36 GAMEWIRE
Voodoo rushes, Incoming's coming, and Kesmai/AOL and Sega/3Dfx have it out.

57 ONLINE-GAME CONNECTION

62 THE PLAYER
Steve Klett
The Player says holiday games shouldn't require a new computer every year.

66 THE OPPONENT
Blade
Blade comments on the state of paying to play online.

214 FACE-OFF
Wirehead/Blade
If you have to save your game every few minutes, Blade says, you need a *cojones* check. Wirehead says it's no problem.

TECHNOBABBLE

195 DVD
Creative launches the first of many DVD-ROM drives, and we tell you whether it's worth the hype—and money.

196 WINDOWS 98
Microsoft says its newest Windows will cure cancer; whether it'll fix your gaming issues is another matter.

198 AGP & USB
The latest acronyms to take over your computer promise great extensibility and graphics. Do they pay off? Find out here.

200 HARDWARE SPOTLIGHT
Will a dual-processor Pentium do anything for your games? Plus, the coolest new 3D cards and peripherals.

206 S.O.S.
Patrick Marshall
Honest answers to your toughest technical questions.

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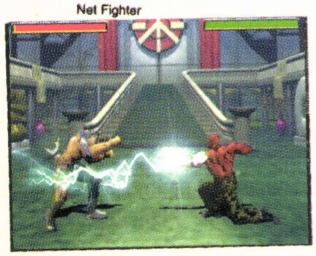
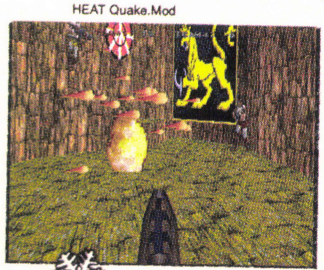
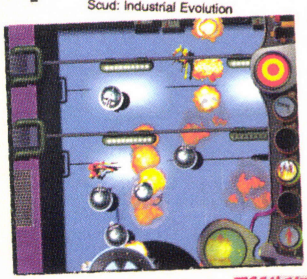


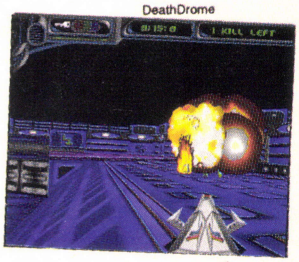
HEAT Quake.Mod



Scud: Industrial Evolution



DeathDrome



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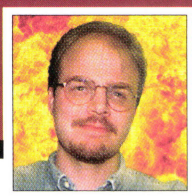

STEVE KLETT

Brace Yourself: Part II

As we put this issue to bed, the holiday-title blitzkrieg was hitting us full-force. Bleary-eyed staff members were stumbling around like zombies, muttering mostly incoherent phrases, like "Must not give in to the Dark Side," "Must defeat the Core," and "Can't sleep, the Freedom Guard must die."

Dozens of new titles have been coming in each week, and the quality of gaming is up across the board. Over the last year or two, game companies have listened to your demands for better graphics, better sound, bigger maps, improved AI, and so forth. They've taken a close look at the games that sold well and noticed that nearly all the top sellers were strong in all these areas—big surprise. And they've striven to improve their games' production values.

You need only look closely at this fall's bumper crop of games for evidence of this. Take this issue alone, which includes reviews of Jedi Knight, Dark Reign, Total Annihilation, Hexen II, Riven, and Age of Empires. Never before has *PC Games* had a reviews section with so many As and Bs.

Admittedly, most of the holiday crop doesn't push the envelope in terms of originality. Indeed, the majority of these games will be composed of C&C döppelgangers (four biggies in this issue). But even these are good. Some are very good, in fact. What we saw at E3—which I noted here in this column in September ("Brace Yourself")—indicated that the quality of games would be strong this fall, and so far, that's true.

The bad news? Well, there are still too many games coming out at the same time competing for too few dollars. Even the most hardcore gaming enthusiasts can't buy and play all the good ones. Heck, we can't do it, and we get 'em all for free.

This holiday season holds more potential than ever for good games to do badly at the register. This translates into fewer games next year as companies go under (many small companies have everything riding on a single title) and many strong potential franchise games fail.

The game companies have proven they're willing to listen to consumers' wishes when it comes to quality. Hopefully they'll listen now and understand—for their own good—that you'll buy and play a great game whenever it comes out—not just at Christmas.

But that's not for you to worry about! Pay close attention to *PC Games* this month; we'll help you skim the absolute cream of the huge crop. Enjoy the fruits of this holiday season. You never know: Next year's pickings may be a little slim.

Steve Klett

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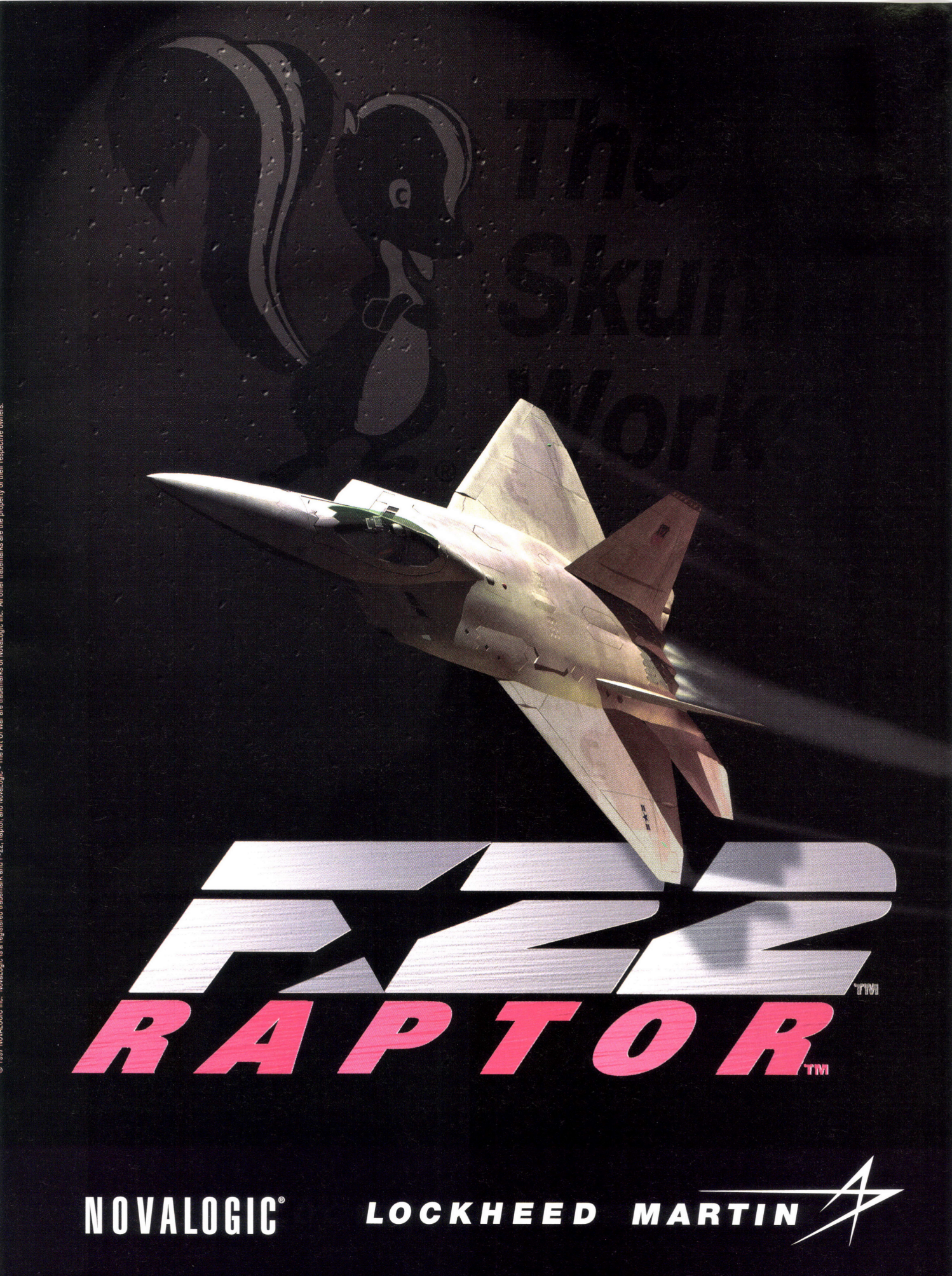

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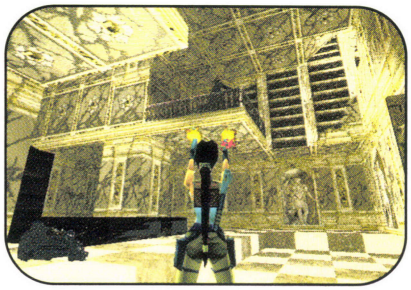
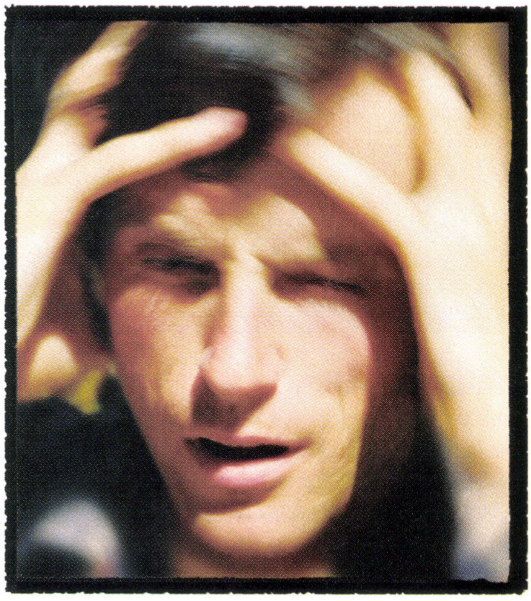
1:30 PM,

BRISTOL, ENGLAND -- AS CONAL WILMOT EXPLAINS IT, "I SEE HER EVERYWHERE... IN THE PUB, THE SHOPS AND ONCE, RIGHT THERE NEXT TO ME IN THE LOO. BUT THEN, I TURN MY HEAD AND SHE'S GONE." CONAL'S MOM THINKS HE'S "PLAIN BARKING MAD." HIS BEST BUDDY MICK JUST WISHES IT WOULD HAPPEN TO HIM.





Inset photo (above): Without warning, tea time becomes TR II time.

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Achtung Spitfire!

Publisher: Avalon Hill

Achtung Spitfire! is a turn-based air-combat strategy game set over Western Europe during the first half of World War II, with special emphasis on the classic Battle of Britain in 1940. You can fight single air-battles, fly historical missions, or serve an entire tour of duty (tours of duty are disabled in the demo). Take command of one fighter in a dogfight or a whole squadron of frontline airplanes through the early years of the war.

All of the pilots and airplanes under your command have unique skills and characteristics that affect how they fly in combat. In the campaign, you select the pilots and weapons and make coordinated battle plans. You choose the tactical maneuvers in swirling dogfights. This is not a flight simulator: you don't need fast reflexes with a joystick. All you need are tactical smarts.

Please refer to the README.TXT for a complete listing of the menu commands and keyboard shortcuts.

Byzantine: The Betrayal

Publisher: Discovery Channel Multimedia

Note: Run this demo by double-clicking on the .exe in the folder. It won't run through the interface.

Byzantine: The Betrayal is a first-person graphic adventure that draws the player into a murderous conspiracy stretching from Byzantine's ancient past to cyber-generated worlds of virtual reality.

This interactive demo will show you actual screens from various parts of the game.

Civil War Generals 2: Grant, Lee, Sherman

Publisher: Sierra On-Line

Civil War Generals 2, building on its predecessor, Robert E. Lee, includes some breakthrough new features. Fight Union or Confederate, in the eastern or western theater. New terrain types include walls, ruins, open water, coast, swamps, knolls, and pontoon bridges. The map editor and zoom allow greater detail and endless customizability. New film footage, artwork, and multimedia history bring the Civil War alive in the full version.

Only one scenario (Bull Run) is included in the demo, and placing units and saving maps in the Scenario Editor has been disabled.

Claw

Publisher: Monolith Productions

Claw is a high-resolution arcade-style platformer. During the adventure, you'll be sword-fighting with pirates, finding mystical power-ups, riding elevators,

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swinging on ropes, avoiding death traps, and, best of all, grabbing loads of treasure!

The Claw demo contains two small playable levels to give you a taste of what the full game has to offer.

Keyboard commands are configurable once you start the game.

DEMO OF THE MONTH

Dark Earth

Publisher: MicroProse

Dark Earth is a real-time action/adventure game set in an active, visually stunning world. It features real-time combat, time constraints on solving puzzles, and characters who respond to the players' actions while acting on their own. The graphics are remarkable and include 260 pre-rendered and animated views, over 100 unique and separately modeled real-time characters, and 25 minutes of high-quality video footage.

This demo will introduce you to the beginning of the game. There are many controls, though, so hit F1 once to call up the help screen with a complete listing.

Key:	Action:
Tab	Change Arkhan's mood (light/dark)
Arrow Keys	Move Arkhan
Shift + Up	Run forward
Shift + Left, Right	Strafe left, right
Space Bar	Action key
C	Turn combat mode on/off
Ctrl	Easy mode combat
Ctrl + Arrow Keys	Normal mode combat
Ctrl + Shift + Up	Special attack mode
Esc	Open main menu
P	Pause/resume
Enter	Interrupt dialogue and text
I or Backspace	Open inventory
O	Put object away

Entrepreneur

Publisher: Stardock Systems

In a nutshell, Entrepreneur is about starting a company and trying to conquer the world via a monopoly. It's billed as being played by CEOs at companies like Microsoft, Apple, Oracle, Sun, General Motors, Nabisco, and elsewhere—in real life, of course.

There is also a walkthrough included in this archive called "walk.txt."

G-Police

Publisher: Psygnosis

The year is 2097, and the G-Police are struggling to keep control of Callisto, one of Jupiter's moons and the setting for this strategic flight-combat game. Inspiration for the plot comes from classic films like *Blade Runner* and *Aliens*. You play the role of Jeff Slater, a veteran war pilot who's looking into the mysterious death of his sister, Elaine, who was a G-Police recruit herself. Although it was dismissed as a suicide, Slater believes otherwise and assumes a secret identity, joining the G-Police to find out what really happened that day.

This demo version of G-Police won't save your options settings, so any changes to the configuration will be lost when you quit the demo; this means you have to reconfigure your keys every time you restart the game. Hardware 3D acceleration is supported.

The Golf Pro—Featuring Gary Player

Publisher: Empire Interactive

Imagine a golf simulation where control of the golfer is so advanced it feels like the real thing. This is it.

The demo features one hole (the 14th) from the full game, plus the tutorial on how to play—which is pretty vital, considering the unique swing function that requires plenty of practice to master. In the mouse setup, make sure that you don't have to move it too far to get a good degree of swing. Each setup will be different, depending on how your machine/mouse is positioned, but practice makes perfect.

Please refer to the README.TXT for more information.

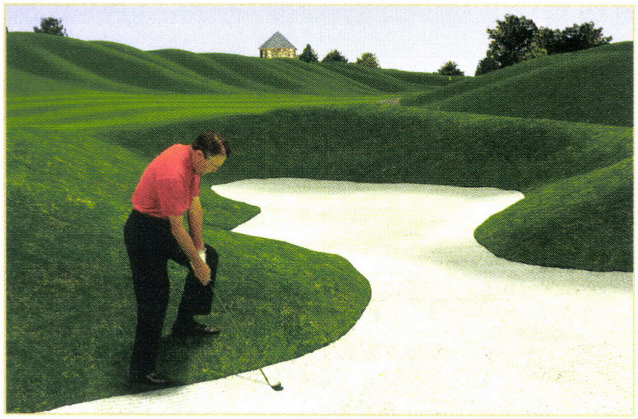
Hexen II

Publisher: Activision

With the remains of the first two Serpent Riders' armies added to his already powerful forces, the third Serpent Rider, Eidolon, stalked forth into the realm of mankind. No mercy was shown by this ravenous onslaught, and soon, the tribes of humanity fell to the Dark Generals of the Serpent Rider. Or something.

This shareware version allows play on the first of four hubs (the Greco-Roman), with complete multi-

AT LAST, A GOLF GAME WITH NO HANDICAP.



FEEL THE CLUB THROUGH YOUR FINGERTIPS. YOUR MOUSE IS POISED TO ADDRESS THE BALL. A SUBTLE OPENING OF YOUR WRIST ANGLES THE CLUBFACE. SWEEP THE MOUSE BACK, THEN FORWARD IN ONE ELEGANT MOTION. A SMOOTH AND RHYTHMIC SWING, FULL OF POWER & CONTROL. TRUE CONTACT. MOUSE ON BALL.

A low drive into the wind? A fade with a six-iron round a tree? An explosion shot from a deep pot bunker? You have the technology. Serious control. Serious golf. It feels perfect. And it looks perfect too. Flowing terrain, surveyed to the last inch. Fine textures down the rolling fairway to the contoured green. The bunkers raked, and 20,000 frames of animation put you in the correct stance even in the most awkward lie.

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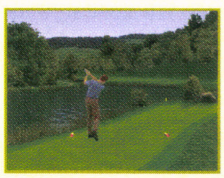
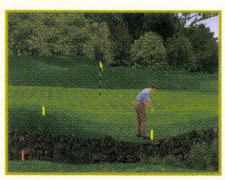
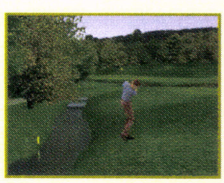
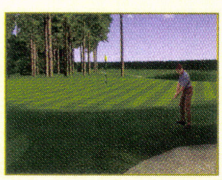
THE Golf PRO

Featuring Gary Player

A STROKE OF GENIUS

AND THE REST OF THE SCORE? EXTENSIVE TV-STYLE COMMENTARY, FULL INTERNET PLAY AND CHAMPIONSHIPS FOR UP TO 32 GOLFERS, 18 PRIVATE LESSONS FROM GARY PLAYER, 36 COMPELLING HOLES OF GOLF ON HILTON HEAD NATIONAL, SOUTH CAROLINA & ST MELLION INTERNATIONAL, ENGLAND. INTELLIGENT HANDICAPPING AND RANGE OF COMPETITIONS.



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player support. An OpenGL version is also included for those with the 3Dfx cards to support it (and it looks great!).

iF-22

Publisher: Interactive Magic

iF-22 is a state-of-the art flight simulator highlighting the newest weapon in the USAF's arsenal. A dynamic campaign/mission generation system and photorealistic terrain help make iF-22 a sterling simulation of the F-22 Raptor.

Please refer to the README.TXT file for more information, a short tutorial, and a complete listing of the keyboard commands.

Incubation

Publisher: Blue Byte

In this demo, you can lead a squad of marines through the first four missions of the full version, or battle up to three of your friends in a unique multiplayer level. Play over a LAN, the Internet, or between two PCs connected with a serial cable. Either way, you'll enjoy eye-popping 3D graphics that can be viewed from almost any angle with the mouse-controlled, free-floating camera. Incubation uses the Extreme Assault graphics engine and supports many popular 3Dfx cards.

Be sure to open any chests you find on the floor to uncover pleasant surprises like ammo and equipment points for better weapons, armor, and supplies. Also, don't miss the two instant-action bonus missions included in this demo. Here, you'll be able to fight a larger variety of Scay'Ger with more of the nasty weapons found in the full version.

Mageslayer

Publisher: GT Interactive

As one of four savage Mageslayers, you're on a quest for ancient relics through five separate worlds over 25 levels. Scorch your enemies with a brutal armory of spells and weapons. Solve wicked environmental puzzles.

This demo will allow you to hack and slash the first world using two of the four character classes, the Earthlord and Inquisitor. 3D acceleration is yet to be supported.

Need for Speed II: SE (3Dfx Demo)

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Put the brand-new Ferrari 355 F1 through its paces on the beautiful new Mexican track in this 3Dfx-only demo.

This demo only supports keyboard controls.

Up.....Accelerate
Down.....Brake
Left and Right.....Steer
Space.....Handbrake
A.....Shift up
Z.....Shift down
C.....Change camera mode
H.....Horn
Tab.....Take screenshot
F2.....Toggle chrome mapping
F3.....View distance adjustment
F4.....Toggle horizon
F5.....HUD adjustment
F8.....Toggle music
F9.....Toggle sounds
F10.....Gamma-correction adjustment
Esc.....Pause

NetStorm

Publisher: Activision

NetStorm was built from the ground up for multiplayer Internet and LAN play, with the idea that players would experience zero lag.

This demo is complete with three full missions, multiplayer capability, and a full tutorial to help you learn all there is to know about the Nimbian universe. Plus, your saved games from the demo are fully usable with the full version.

Nuclear Strike

Publisher: Electronic Arts

This demo version of Nuclear Strike contains a specially created mini-level.

key to cycle through known enemies, and the F3 key to cycle through remaining assets.

To transfer into the M1 Abrams tank or AV-8 Harrier, first complete Mission 1 by destroying most of the island defenses. Then hover over the Landing Zone next to the vehicle (it's blue with a red arrow).

While you can fly over the entire map, only the northeast quarter is populated.

Controls

General:

Keypad 8/2.....Moves forward/backward
Keypad 4/6.....Turns left/right
Keypad 7/9.....Jink left/right
Numpad Enter.....Changes camera view
Enter .....Enters SMFD
H.....Cycles HUD options
D .....Jettisons cargo
Left Shift + Weapon key
.....Select a weapon for the target box
D (held for 1 sec) ....Call in chopper to transfer from ground Vehicle
P .....Pause
M .....Activate mouse (in enhanced HUD, 640-by-480 res)

Weapons:

Spacebar .....Fires Chaingun
X.....Fires Hydra Rocket
Z.....Fires Hellfire Missile
C.....Fires Sidewinder

Other:

The HUD radar is located in the bottom-right corner of the screen. The chopper is in the center of the circle. Red = Enemy; White = Fuel/Ammo/Friendly; Blue = Mission item; Yellow = Heading.

To use the waypoint indicators (they appear in your compass and point you to your next objective), enter the SMFD and select the item you'd like it to point to (next mission, fuel, ammo, etc.). After exiting the SMFD, you'll notice a blue (mission), red (enemy), or white (asset) arrow in the compass. Alternately, you can use the F1 key to cycle through available missions, the F2

Postal

Publisher: Ripcord Games

Here's the media-blitzed third-person action shooter with a simple objective: kill everyone! Be disgruntled, go on a mad rage, and blow everything up! This is the way to relieve stress!

This demo version includes one single-player level from the full version, with three difficulty settings. It also includes a multiplayer level and a challenge level. The various buttons and controls are fully user-configurable once you're in the game.

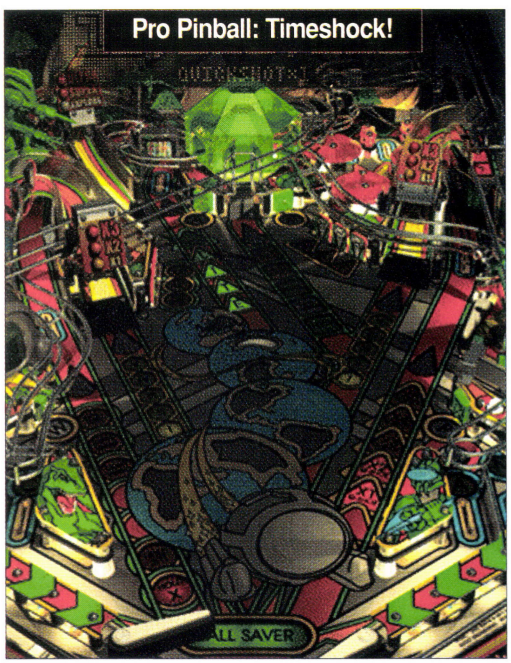
Pro Pinball: Timeshock!

Publisher: Empire Interactive

Travel through time to try and save the universe in the most realistic pinball simulation ever.

Controls are fully configurable once the game's started, but here are the defaults:

Left Shift.....Left Flipper
Right Shift .....Right Flipper



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Now you see him.
Usually you don't.

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SPECIALTY: STEALTH

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Left Alt .....“Nudge” the left side of the table.
Right Alt.....“Nudge” the right side of the table.
Space.....“Nudge”
S.....Start new game
Backspace.....Magnosave

SKRAP

Publisher: NeuronWare

The object of SKRAP is to lead your band of rebel slaves through a hostile corporate county to freedom. Your mission is to pilot the experimental helicopter Spartacus to provide support for rebel ground vehicles that must fight their way past numerous enemy structures, vehicles, weapons, and various traps. In order to destroy the enemy base, you must protect a truck carrying an extremely powerful explosive into the enemy base. You're in charge of coordinating the ground forces by sending out rebel attack vehicles.

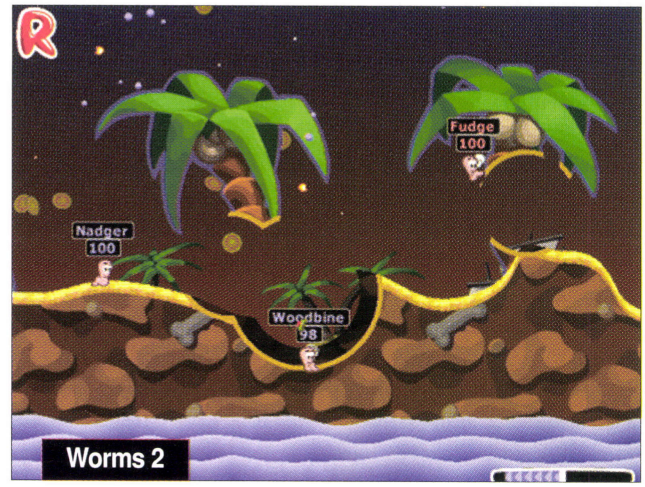
Please see the INSTRUCT.TXT file for full instructions on how this game is played.

Warbirds 2.0

Publisher: I-Magic Online

Note: Only the first five hours are free, after which you must pay a nominal fee in order to keep playing online. This is not a free online game.

Warbirds in an online-only, multiplayer WWII flight-combat game. Your opponents are all living, thinking people whose skills are improving just as yours are. Please refer to the Warbirds 2.0 help file for complete information on the game, including aircraft controls and how to sign onto I-Magic's server.



Worms 2

WarSport

On Mplayer

In the far-distant future, Pro Football has been replaced by a much more violent sport called WarSport. It's a no-holds-barred contest. You win by scoring points, and there ain't no room for solo contests (it's for two to eight humans only). WarSport is exclusively designed and played as a multiplayer game.

Worms 2

Publisher: MicroProse

Worms 2 is the sequel to the cult arcade-strategy game Worms. The most addicting game since Lemmings, Worms 2 is turn-based, where the player takes command of a platoon of worms who inhabit a randomly generated terrain. The player's goal is to obliterate rivals with an assortment of devastating weapons on insane and bizarre landscapes. Each turn is limited to a set number of seconds and affected by a variable wind force. The time limit allows you to position your worm in a nearby safe place, collect any of the bonus items lying around, or go attack and destroy a neighboring worm.

This demo only allows hot-seat multiplay (no single-play), with many weapons and features missing from the full game. There's also a time limit, and a limit of two teams of two worms only.

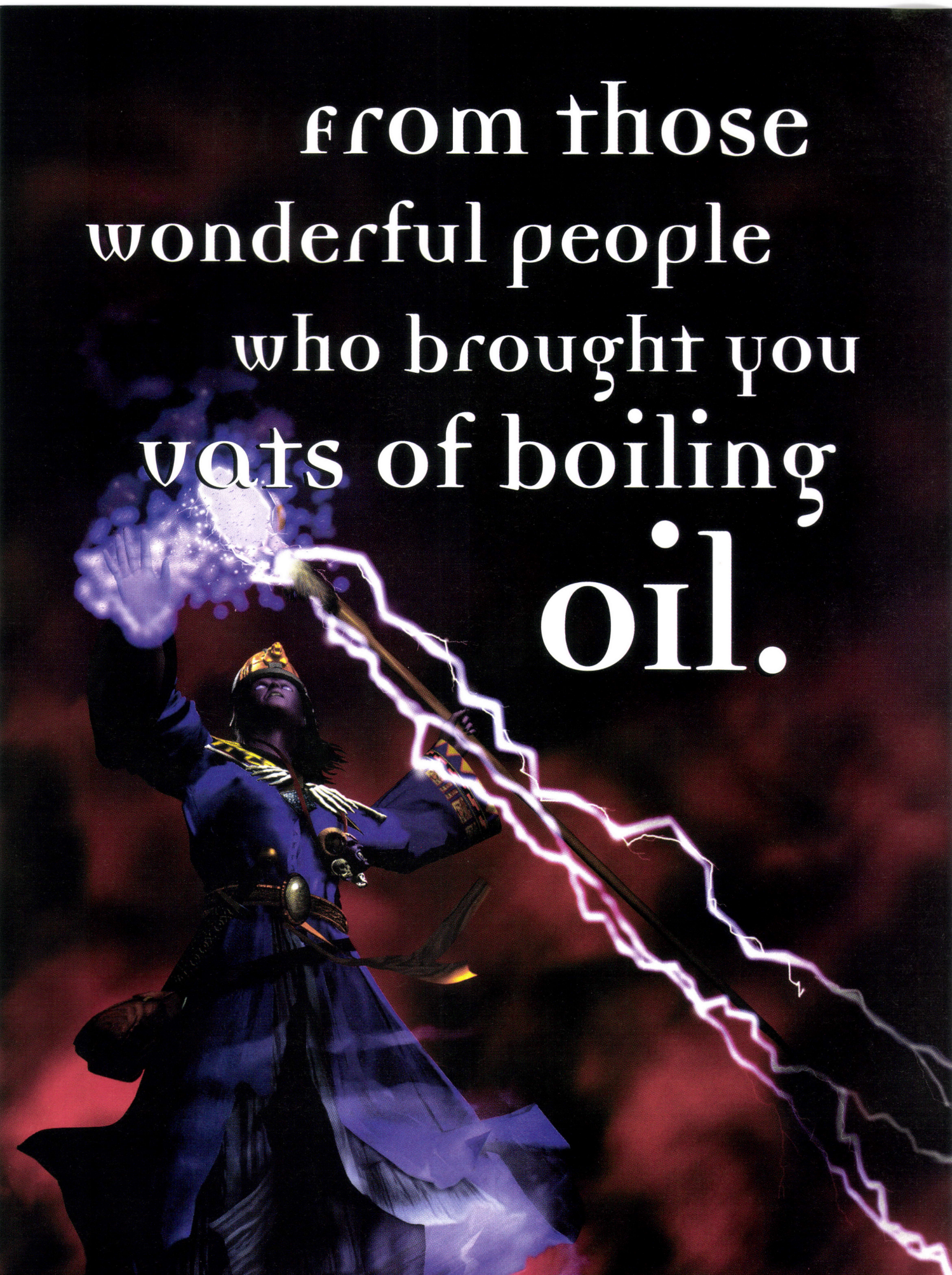
Zork: Grand Inquisitor

Zork: Grand Inquisitor

Publisher: Activision

The land of Zork is slowly dying. All traces of its magic are being hunted down and destroyed by the tyrannical Grand Inquisitor. To save the crumbling Empire, you must journey back in time to the days of old Zork.

In the demo, you play the faceless, ageless, genderless adventure-person. You are in Port Foozle, where the most elite troops of the Grand Inquisition are hunting for a magic lantern that you just happen to possess. You must evade the Inquisition and seek refuge in the Great Underground Empire. To complete the demo, you must open three doors in the Great Underground Empire: the door to the Dungeon Master's lair, the door to GUE Tech, and the turnstile to Z Underground, Zork's fabulous subway system.


from those
wonderful people
who brought you
vats of boiling
oil.

LORDS OF MAGIC™

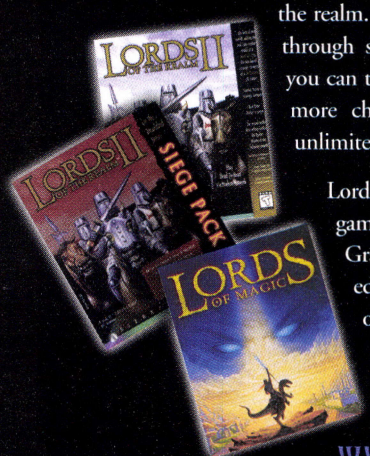
8 magical races

When the evil sorcerer Balkoth threatens the peaceful people of Urak with death and destruction, brave heroes with magical powers must rise up to stop the reign of terror and defeat the forces of tyranny. In Lords of Magic, the successor to the popular Lords of the Realm II, you enter a fantasy world where good and evil fight for primacy against a mystical backdrop of wizards, warriors, spells and storms, giants, gnomes, and Barbarians.

As you explore the land of Urak, you'll battle in dark and mysterious caves, castles and dungeons

3-D Terrain Editor

Building on the dramatic features that made Lords of the Realm II a breakthrough in strategy gaming, Lords of Magic combines turn-based exploration and resource management with real-time combat. Join forces with others (up to six players can compete on a LAN or over the Internet) or marshal your forces to take on Balkoth and his Barbarian allies alone. You'll command up to Eighty creatures, including elves, vampires, skeletons, and gargoyles, as you defeat evil and save the realm. Wielding the forces of magic through spells and artifacts of power, you can take multiple paths to victory: more choices, more outcomes, and unlimited replayability.



Lords of Magic features a true 3-D game map, with 16 bit SVGA Graphics and a powerful map editor that puts you in control of terrain height, topography, and texture.

comes a mu

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Impressions

RATING PENDING
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select one of eight cities to be the center of your empire
In your library wizards will research spells to overpower your enemies
tical world of swords and sorcery
Deep inside your wizard tower sorcerers practice their secret arts to conjure magical creatures and train new acolytes
CHAMPION
GONDALORE
when you confront the enemy forces of Balkoth, "zoom in" to real time combat

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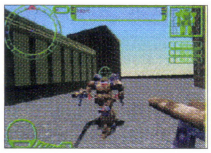
DEMOS

Pax Imperia: Eminent Domain
Jedi Knight
Krush, Kill 'n' Destroy
Age of Empires
Nuclear Strike
International Rally Championship
Civil War Generals 2
NetStorm
Close Combat: A Bridge Too Far
Turok: Dinosaur Hunter
Mageslayer
Need for Speed II: SE 3Dfx Edition
Defiance
Postal (new version)
Worms 2
Ignite
Shipwreckers
Constructor
7th Legion
Dark Angel

PATCHES

TigerShark
FPS: Baseball Pro '98
Links LS '98
Moto Racer (Matrox m3D)
MDK (PowerVR)
Ecstatica II
iF-22
Blood v. 1.11
Hexen II (Rendition Vérité)
Hexen II v. 1.09
Flying Corps v. 1.11c

SNEAK PEEKS!



There are so many hot games coming up, we just can't stop talking about 'em! When you've enjoyed all the reviews and previews in this month's issue, check out what we've got for you at PC Games Online. This month's stories include multimedia previews of Heavy Gear and Myth—two of the most anticipated games of the year—plus the skinny on Alien Earth, an action/adventure/RPG pitting survivors against the evils of a ravaged planet.

CRACKING THE HOLIDAY GAMES — CONTINUED!

This month's strategy blowout aims to please, but there's more where this came from. While you're waiting for next month's sim/strategy/sports sequel, check out what we've got going at **www.pcgames.com**. We're giving you even more action-game goodies, including the complete walkthrough to Resident Evil and some of our own Jedi Knight tips. Don't miss 'em!

REDLINE

If you've enjoyed our ongoing Redline coverage, hit **www.pcgames.com**. We've got the whole saga right here—from level design to marketing, and all the tweaks between—along with a nifty collection of stunning screenshots. It's worth the look.

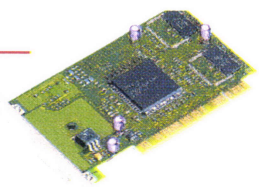
THE SNIPER

He'll frag you and your friend while you're having a saber duel in Jedi Knight. He'll do sweep after endless sweep 'til he breaks you in Virtua Fighter 2. He's stealthy, sneaky, and morally objectionable—and he wouldn't have it any other way. Follow our resident snipey-boy as he explores the credo of playing to win, no matter what it takes. Only at PC Games Online.

THE GRUMPY GAMER

He's Butt-head with a brain; a gamer with a gripe. Yup, the Grumpy Gamer's got some heated, opinionated, and always provocative opinions on the world of PC gaming. Check out his raves, rants, and fiery declarations at **www.pcgames.com**.

3D CARDS: THE HOLIDAY ROUNDUP



Join us as we recap the heaps of 3D cards we've reviewed over the last few months. News & Technology Editor George Chronis gives his verdict on which are the best buys this winter.

www.pcgames.com

We've joined up with Happy Puppy and Games Domain to provide you with even more info and coverage on all the new games being released!

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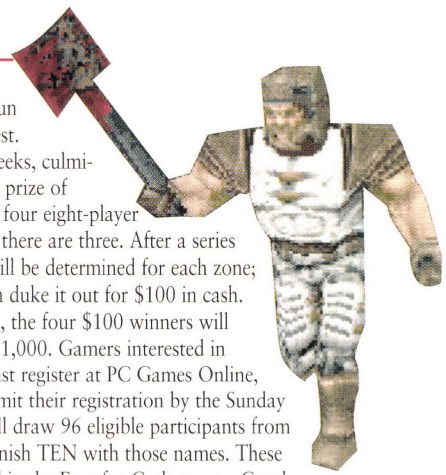
FRAG FOR CASH



By the time you have this issue in hand, we'll have already begun our weekly Frag for Cash contest. The contest will run for four weeks, culminating in a frag-fest for a grand prize of $1,000. Each week begins with four eight-player games per TEN zone, of which there are three. After a series of qualifying bouts, a winner will be determined for each zone; the three zone winners will then duke it out for $100 in cash. Finally, at the end of the month, the four $100 winners will play a deathmatch for the big $1,000. Gamers interested in participating in the frag-fest must register at PC Games Online, create a TEN account, and submit their registration by the Sunday before the event. *PC Games* will draw 96 eligible participants from the pool of registrants, then furnish TEN with those names. These will be the only players allowed in the Frag for Cash arenas. Good luck to all!

HAPPY PUPPY RADIO

You already know that Happy Puppy brings you the best games info you've ever laid eyes on, but here's something that will be music to your ears: The Happy Puppy Radio Show. HP Radio announcer Felix Cane brings you the hottest in gaming news over the hottest medium, Net radio. Call in each week as Felix and his cast of cronies shout interviews with industry heavyweights and news from the frontiers of the gaming world. HP will also feature Heather Bites Back, who'll answer gamer questions and solve mysteries. So tune in every Saturday afternoon from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. CST. And don't worry if you miss it: you can play back a previously aired show anytime. To listen, just point your browser to **happypuppy.com/newsletter/radio-n.html**.

GET 'EM WHILE THEY'RE HOT

Our downloads section is still going strong, and many of you have been submitting reviews of the games you've grabbed from our site. That makes us happy. In fact, we've already selected our first winner from the monthly drawing. Congratulations and props go out to Adam Bains from Saskatchewan, Canada, for submitting his review of 7th Legion, which he gave a B+ for "offering a bit of freshness in a genre plagued by Command & Conquer clones." Adam has been sent a copy of Sierra's Outpost 2. What's that? You want to get in on the action too? Well then, hop on over to the download area of PC Games.com and grab the featured demo that's highlighted at the top of the page. After you spend a while hacking away at it, get your creative juices flowing and produce a healthy-sized review of the game. Once it's complete, blast it on over to Marcale, our online manager (*mwallace@pcgames.com*). Everyone who enters will be placed in a monthly random drawing to win some really cool stuff.

PREVIEWS

Alien Earth *(Playmates)*
Heavy Gear: Multimedia Preview *(Activision)*
Incoming *(Rage)*
Myth: Multimedia Preview *(Bungie)*
Nightmare Creatures *(Activision)*
Revenant *(Eidos)*
Sub Culture *(Ubi Soft)*

NEWS

Check out our News section for the latest scoop on games, gamemakers, and other computer-game info. We update this section daily, so keep on comin'!

INTERVIEWS

Pull up an ear as we get up close and chatty with Sid Meier, John Romero, Ron Millar, and more of the gaming world's biggest stars.

CHEATS

Having trouble beating that one mission, killing that one creature? Check out our cheats for some gaming greats—and new games, too, like Birthright and Terracide.

STRATEGIES

Tips and tactics for some of your favorite challenges, including Diablo, Dungeon Keeper, MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries, MDK, Syndicate Wars, and more!

DEATH is NOTHING WITHOUT TORMENT.

MAGESLAYER

A malevolent
3D fantasy quest from the
creators of HEXEN™ and HEXEN II™

An all-powerful war chest of magical attacks like Chain Lightning and the Firewhip.

Play as one of 4 death-dealing Mageslayers across dozens of hellish levels.

Soul-destroying 3-D environments heaving with diabolical traps and mysteries.

Spread the Evil with several modes of MultiSlayer action for up to 16 players.

Death would be too easy. Too little to repay a thousand year old debt. Too quick to satisfy the hunger of one you betrayed in another millennium. Before he extracts his terrible price on your soul, you are bound to wander through five worlds of atrocity. Stoking your powers. Gathering magic for one last, desperate struggle against Evil. Only then will he anoint you with the last sacraments of your torment.

No, **Death** would be too easy.

Windows® 95

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

RAVEN

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Question of the Month:

"Kids'" Games

Huh huh, huh huh—*kids' games*. You wouldn't be caught dead playing one of these titles for tykes, would you? Or *would* you? What do you think about games like Toy Story, Goosebumps, Jonny Quest, and the like, which are aimed at "younger" audiences but aren't quite toddler edu-ware? Enjoyable, or avoidable? Strictly for kids, or good between Quake bouts? Where do you draw the line between "kids'" and "adults'" games, or is it all fun? One randomly chosen letter-writer gets a free game and a mature *PC Games* T-shirt. Send your thoughts (along with your age) to PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404; fax: 415-349-7482; email: pcgamesletters@pcgames.com. Please include your full name with each letter.

Clone Woes

I just finished reading October's The Player column ("You Can Keep a Good Game Down"), and let me tell you, it scared the hell out of me. You described M.A.X. perfectly.

M.A.X. is my favorite wargame, but nobody on Kali plays it. Some M.A.X. 2 features I'd love to see include multiplayer options like allies, computer opponents in multiplay, new maps, and multiplay for more than four players. The single-player mode was PERFECT!

Maybe a M.A.X.net (à la Battle.net) or coming with two discs like Red Alert would've helped. A better manual might've helped, too: the one we got sucked, and it wasn't even 100 percent accurate. But the gameplay was numero uno.

Oh well—I guess a truly unique game dies, and I'm stuck playing crappy first-person clones forever. By the way, I challenge anyone with C&C to play M.A.X. real-time. I am willing to wager that they'll like M.A.X. better once they learn how to play, as long as they have a good PC.

A really bummed-out faithful reader,
Michael
Via email

I enjoyed (and was disturbed by) The Player's column in October's *PC Games*. The game you're alluding to is obviously M.A.X. Like you, I discovered this gem after its release. It quickly became one of my all-time favorite strategy titles. I did as you advised and introduced my friends to it, and as a result, Interplay sold five more copies.

However, when I contacted them about suggestions for the next version, they alluded to the fact that they were "normalizing" the game. Now that I've read your article, I am dismayed to hear that they appear to have gone ahead with this idea. The greatest mistake they could make would be to turn this game into a C&C: Red Alert clone. I personally loathe Red Alert. The Tank Rush is the most inane waste of time (and the game's only viable strategy) I've ever experienced.

Please tell me that my fears about M.A.X. 2 have not come to pass! Do gamers like me and my friends have any ability to influence the decisions of marketing machines? As a developer, I understand the market pressures involved when designing a product. My greatest fear is that computer games will be reduced to the level of console titles: no diversity ("Would you like the sports game or the Mortal Kombat clone with that, sir?"), no depth, and lots of glitz.

Kolby Kappes
Via email

Egad—I hope it wasn't War Wind II that The Player was talking about in his October column. I'd feel real guilty for waiting to pick it up in a bargain bin if it reduced the sequel (which I probably would've paid full price for) to another C&C 1.5.

I think War Wind failed for a few reasons, though. Red Alert was definitely one of them, but most importantly, SSI didn't distinguish whether it was tech-ish (C&C) or fantasy-based (Warcraft II). It's my experience that many gamers don't cross over genres, so SSI may have inadvertently turned off both segments by its lack of commitment to one or the other in its marketing efforts.

It was, however, a damn fine game—one that I admittedly would love to have the time to really master.

Blake
Via email

Was The Player talking about M.A.X. 2, War Wind II, or some other game? For now, he's remaining silent in the interest of fairness; when he reviews the game in question, he'll reveal whether his concerns were borne out.

Regarding M.A.X. 2, the game that most respondents thought we were talking about, we definitely agree that M.A.X.'s failure to catch on with the mainstream audience was a true shame. Its dazzling mix of real-time and turn-based strategy made for some great battles, and when a title like this goes unnoticed, it's a loss for gamers everywhere.

As to whether you and your friends have the power to affect companies' development decisions, Kolby, we'd say you definitely do. After all, it's your money that pays for their products, bills, and salaries. If you don't like a particular gaming trend, then don't buy certain products. And better yet, send your specific complaints, concerns, and suggestions to the offending publisher. If enough of you speak, they have to listen. Trite, but true.

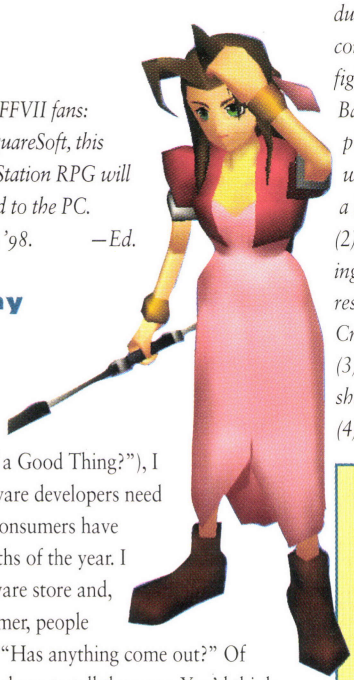
—Ed.

INCOMING!

Fantasy Fulfilled?

After reading so much about Final Fantasy VII, I keep wondering whether it'll be ported to the PC. I dream of playing it on my computer.

Mark Cabael
Chicago, IL



Good news for FFVII fans: According to SquareSoft, this impressive PlayStation RPG will indeed be ported to the PC. Expect it in late '98. —*Ed.*

Too Many Games?

In response to September's Mercenary ("Too Much of a Good Thing?"), I think that software developers need to realize that consumers have money 12 months of the year. I work in a software store and, during the summer, people constantly ask, "Has anything come out?" Of course, I always have to tell them no. You'd think that the games would pour in during this time, when every computer geek is trapped inside their house because the evil, blinding, fiery ball in the sky has pushed the temperature up to 100 degrees. They would surely venture out from their air-conditioned abodes to buy the newest games, but the games are just not here to buy.

Nick Robalik
Via email

Give Me the Scoop

Could you please give me (and other curious gamers) any information you might have on the following things: Diablo II, the Tomb Raider movie, SiN, and the Spice Girls movie? Thanks!

Phillipp Motuzas
Via email

Sure thing, Phillipp:
(1) Blizzard hasn't said much about Diablo II since announcing it at the European Computer Trade Show in September. What they're promising so far includes "an expanded world with all-new quests, weapons, spells, armor, monsters, and NPCs; five new character classes with unique attributes and abilities; four different, fully populated towns with randomly generated dungeons and wilderness areas; an advanced combat system incorporating class-specific fighting techniques and spells; and new Battle.net options such as increased multiplayer support, an online trading post, and worldwide rankings." Diablo II is scheduled for a late 1998 release.
(2) According to Eidos, "Rumors have been circulating, but no movie deal has been signed. We are researching the possibility of bringing TR and Lara Croft to many different entertainment avenues."
(3) You missed our SiN scoop last issue? For shame!
(4) Bwah ha ha! —*Ed.*

Flyin' High

I just wanted to thank you for covering Warbirds in October's Opponent column. I've been playing it with one of the German squadrons (JG-14) since its first beta over two years ago. We love it, and we love when new people join. All of us were newbies at some point—and many of us will still lend them a hand.

Jonathan Kuehne
Via email

Money Call

September's Question of the Month ("Ready to Invest?") generated a firestorm of mail, with a number of heated replies. We asked whether you were ready to spend the money on the souped-up machines that some of next year's games will need. Many of you gave an unqualified yes, feeling that the gameplay benefits of 3D cards and new systems made them well worth it. More of you, however—particularly our younger readers—expressed serious resentment at what you saw as ever-escalating system requirements for some upcoming games, saying you'd hesitate before making serious upgrades or buying a new computer. Here's a sample of your responses:

I don't understand it. Games are requiring more than ever before, and the idea of having to have an almost entirely new system every year or so is inane. Not all gamers can afford several grand a year, thank you very much, and as much as I'd like to be able to play Diablo and Dungeon Keeper and Ultima Online, I don't have the bucks for a new system! Developers need to focus on pushing the envelope for the technology we have now.

Michael Flynn
Via email

I believe spending the extra dollar on hardware is worthwhile in the long run. I am very excited about new games such as NHL 98, Trespasser, and Tomb Raider 2. The enjoyment of playing these games is obviously worth the money. Playing PC games is life, and buying [new equipment] shouldn't be too much of a concern.

Alkaim Ramji
Via email

I don't like all the upgrade hassle we have to put up with, but looking at all the new games, it doesn't look like we have much of a choice.

Michael Grist
Via email

It's ridiculous for gamers to have to constantly shovel out dough for games and then better hardware to run them on, months after they just purchased a game and top-of-the-line hardware. It's a cycle that provides gamers with a few hours of glory and empty pockets. I upgrade my computer gradually, when the technology of a new product is perfected.

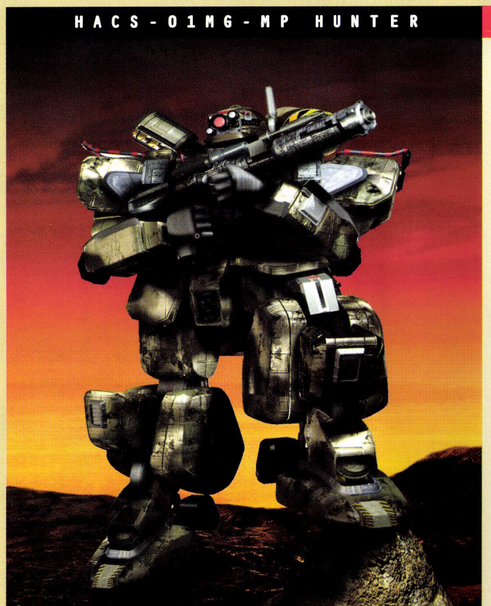
Rochelle Woodbridge
Via email

Hell yeah, it's worthwhile! Those new games may require a $3,000-plus computer, but they'll have kickass gameplay and graphics. I'm willing to buy a new computer if it comes down to it.

R. Eisenberg
Via email

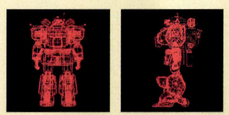
ACTIVISION.

HACS-01MG-MP HUNTER



SPECIFICATIONS

The Hunter Heavy Gear has the distinction of being the first walker on Terra Nova exclusively for military use. A rugged machine which enjoyed an enormous popularity in its prime, the Hunter's simplicity and versatility are the main reasons why it's still used today.



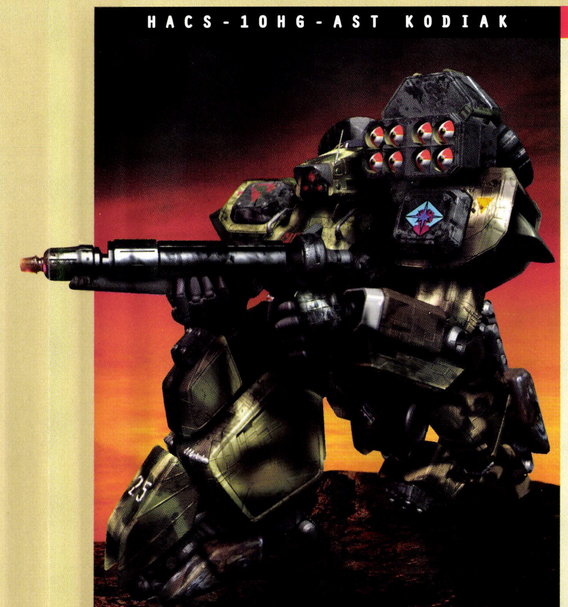
VEHICLE DESCRIPTION

Manufacturer:	Northco
Use:	Trooper Heavy Gear
Height:	4.3 meters
Full combat weight:	6627 kg
Armor material:	Durasheet w/alloy
Average armor thickness:	45 mm
Maximum running speed:	41 kph
Maximum rolling speed:	73.8 kph
Powerplant:	S-V950A V-Engine

WEAPONS

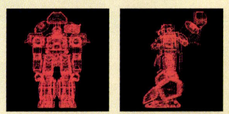
M222 Autocannon Rifle:	60 rounds
RP-109 Pepperbox:	24 rockets
MK IV Grenade Launcher:	6 grenades
M-2A Hand Grenade:	3 grenades

HACS-10HG-AST KODIAK



SPECIFICATIONS

Introduced in the final two cycles of the War of the Alliance, the Kodiak was the sum of Northern engineering, concentrating massive firepower in a mobile package. Quite rare because of its high production cost, it is sought after to add a mystique of power to a regiment.



VEHICLE DESCRIPTION

Manufacturer:	Northco/Shaian Mechanics
Use:	Heavy Assault Heavy Gear
Height:	5.2 (6.2 m w/AGM) meters
Full combat weight:	10,485 kg
Armor material:	Durasheet w/alloy and ceramic
Average armor thickness:	80 mm
Maximum running speed:	37 kph
Maximum rolling speed:	65 kph
Powerplant:	S-V2202 V-Engine

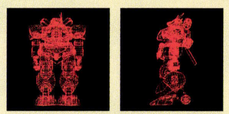
WEAPONS

Northco 8.2 mW XPA-001 Accelerator:	12 shots
GH-16 71 mm Rocket Pod:	36 rockets
Hammerstrike-II Guided Missile Launcher:	12 missiles
Two GU-10 10 mm Gatling Guns:	400 belted cartridges each
Mark IV Grenade Launcher:	6 grenades
Hand Grenade:	6 grenades
Heavy Hand Grenade:	6 grenades

OACS-05M/SU BLACK MAMBA

SPECIFICATIONS

The cutting edge in Southern Gear design, the Black Mamba uses a carbon composite in its internal frame to reduce weight and increase flexibility, making it ideal for commando operations. It also sports rounded composite armor to better deflect incoming rounds.



VEHICLE DESCRIPTION

Manufacturer:	Territorial Arms
Use:	Soldat Heavy Gear
Height:	4.6 meters
Full combat weight:	6230 kg
Armor material:	Armoplast w/composite
Average armor thickness:	56 mm
Maximum running speed:	55.4 kph
Maximum rolling speed:	84 kph
Powerplant:	WV-930TC V-Engine

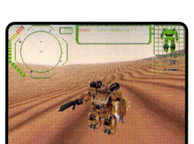
WEAPONS

PR-55 Autocannon:	40 rounds
Vogel-8 Rocket Pod:	32 rockets
Two GL-01 Grenade Launchers:	6 grenades each
HG-C4 Hand Grenades:	3 grenades

THE HEAVY GEARS WERE BORN OUT OF THE WAR OF THE ALLIANCE AFTER EARTH WAS DEFEATED IN ITS ATTEMPT TO CONQUER TERRA NOVA. UNTIL THEN, COMBAT ROBOTS HAD BEEN LARGE AND CUMBERSOME. BUT A SIGNIFICANT TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT MADE CONSTRUCTION AND MINING ROBOTS ADAPTABLE FOR MILITARY USE. COMBINING AN INFANTRYMAN'S FLEXIBILITY WITH AN ARMORED VEHICLE'S DURABILITY, THE HEAVY GEAR BECAME THE PERFECT BATTLE MACHINE.

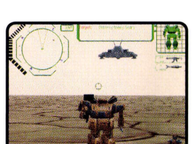
THE STUNNING TEXTURE-MAPPED 3-D GRAPHICS ARE ELEVATED TO THE NEXT LEVEL WITH DIRECT 3D SUPPORT.

GEARS ARE CAPABLE OF AGILE, HUMANOID MOVEMENTS LIKE DUCKING, SIDE-STEPPING, CROUCHING AND KNEELING.



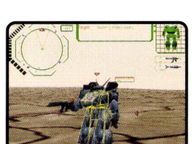
ALL HEAVY GEAR MACHINES ARE EQUIPPED WITH TREADS OR WHEELS FOR HIGH-SPEED SECONDARY MOVEMENT.

BARRAGE YOUR ENEMIES WITH FIELD GUNS, GRENADE LAUNCHERS, LASER CANNONS, BAZOOKAS, MORTARS AND MORE.



PILOT 16 MASSIVE GEARS IN A BATTLEFIELD SHARED BY STRIDERS, TANKS, ARTILLERY AND AIRCRAFT CARRIERS, INFANTRY SOLDIERS AND MORE.

USE MILITARY TACTICS TO YOUR ADVANTAGE — CALL IN AIR AND ARTILLERY STRIKES DURING THE HEAT OF BATTLE.



A STATE-OF-THE-ART, WIRE-FRAMED OVERLAY SYSTEM DISPLAYS DAMAGE DIRECTLY OVER A TARGETED GEAR.

THE NEW BREED

HEAVY GEAR™

COMING THIS FALL
ON WINDOWS®95 CD-ROM

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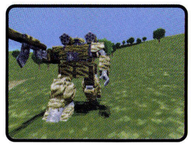
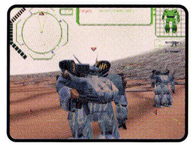
THE NEW BREED OF WAR MACHINE.

THE PRODUCERS OF THE #1-SELLING, 3-D COMBAT SIM OF ALL TIME PRESENT THE NEW BREED.

HEAVY GEAR IS WARFARE PERSONIFIED. A SUPERIOR BREED OF WAR MACHINE WITH ENDLESS TACTICAL CUSTOMIZATIONS. A SPECIALIZED COMBAT SYSTEM WITH HUMANOID CAPABILITIES SUCH AS DODGING, CROUCHING AND KNEELING. A DEVASTATING ARSENAL OF 3-D ENGINE ADVANCEMENTS ONLY THE PRODUCERS OF THE #1-SELLING, 3-D COMBAT SIMULATOR OF ALL TIME COULD UNLEASH. HEAVY GEAR. THE NEW BREED OF WAR MACHINE.



AN IMMENSE UNIVERSE
HEAVY GEAR PROGRESSES AN EPIC COMBAT EXPERIENCE THROUGH A DRAMATIC CHARACTER-BASED STORYLINE AND STUNNING CUTSCENES.



PERPETUAL INTERNET WAR
WATCH YOUR BATTLES AFFECT THE WARFRONT ON A PERSISTENT INTERNET/LAN BATTLE-MAP. CREATE YOUR OWN CHARACTER, AND ACCESS NEW GEARS AND MISSIONS WITH HIGHER RANK.

THE NEW BREED

HEAVY GEAR™

COMING THIS FALL
ON WINDOWS® 95 CD-ROM

ADVANCED GEAR CONSTRUCTION
USE THE SIMPLE DRAG-AND-DROP INTERFACE TO CONSTRUCT AN UNLIMITED ARSENAL OF GEARS FROM THE GROUND UP; PILOT YOUR VISIBLY UNIQUE DESIGNS IN THE SIMULATOR!

3-D BATTLEGROUND REALISM
USE THE TRULY 3-D TERRAIN TO YOUR ADVANTAGE — HIDE BEHIND SAND DUNES AND UTILIZE OTHER LAND FORMATIONS THAT DRASTICALLY IMPROVE YOUR COMBAT EXPERIENCE.

OFFICIAL HEAVY GEAR™ UNIVERSE

SOUNDELUX

INCOMING!

First Person A-Plenty

I was wondering if you guys could provide me with a list of all the first-person shooters and the companies that created them—from Doom up through the new releases that'll be coming out this winter. I know it might be a long list, but I'm a collector and would like to have all these games, whether they're bad or great. I'm calling on the *PC Games* gurus to help me out with this one.

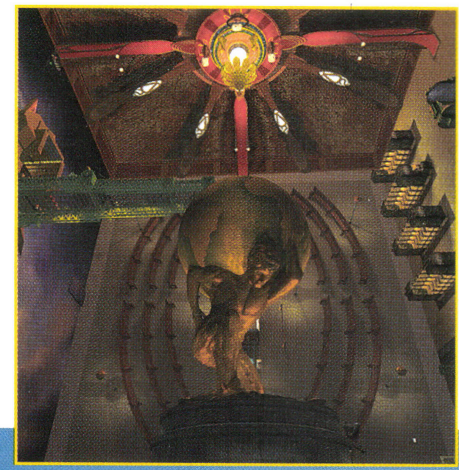
Robert Volonnino
Via email

Whew! That's a hefty order, Robert. Between some heated bouts of Jedi Knight, Hexen II, and the rest of this month's shooter barrage, we sat down and brainstormed. Here are all the first-person shoot-'em-ups we could think of (including some we'd like to forget), in order of publisher. Note: To keep the list manageable, we stuck with strictly Doom/Quake–style action games—not other types of first-person games (Descent, MechWarrior 2, WipeOut XL) or games with only partial shooter elements (Realms of the Haunting, Shadows of the Empire, Star Trek: Generations). If you can think of any we missed, drop us a line. —Ed.

- Blake Stone, Wolfenstein 3D, Rise of the Triad, Duke Nukem 3D, Blood, Shadow Warrior (3D Realms)
- Alien Trilogy (Acclaim)
- Eradicator (Accolade)
- Hexen II (Activision)
- Island Peril (Atlantean Interactive)
- Terminator: Rampage, Terminator 2029, Terminator: Future Shock, SkyNET (Bethesda)
- Marathon 2, ZPC (Bungie Software)
- TekWar (Capcom)
- Witchaven, Witchaven II (Capstone)
- Quiver (ESD Games)
- Doom, Doom II, Heretic, Hexen, Quake, XS (GT Interactive)
- Assassin 2015 (Inscape)
- Redneck Rampage (Interplay)
- Dark Forces, Outlaws, Jedi Knight (LucasArts)
- CyberMage (Origin)
- Powerslave (Playmates Interactive)
- In Pursuit of Greed (Softdisk)
- Strife (Velocity)

Upcoming:

- Aliens Online, Chasm, Daikatana, Duke Nukem Forever, Half-Life, Prey, Quake 2, SiN, Star Trek: First Contact, Unreal



Spirit of Adventure

October's Question of the Month ("Adventure Games: Dead or Alive?") generated some passionate comments on the genre's future. Here's a look at some of your responses. This month's prize winner (chosen at random) is Jacob Carpenter, who gets a free game and a PC Games T-shirt. Thanks to everyone who contributed!

It's a known fact that written words have a healing effect on the brain: they can expand your vocabulary and aid your ability to learn new things. Today's adventure games, with their point-and-click interfaces and dazzling graphics, are nothing more than eye candy. Most adventurers use more brain power doing Internet searches for a walkthrough than they do on the actual game.

So, are adventure games dead? In truth, yes. They will continue to lose popularity until the day we change how we look at gaming. Let's do a throwback and force ourselves to learn a thing or two, and not just sit back and have images thrown at us at 30 fps.

Ronald Hood
Vancouver, WA

I'm very excited about today's adventure games, and especially about what's coming tomorrow. With 3D-rendered worlds, game makers have endless possibilities—the 3D environment is a perfect place for imaginative game developers to tell their stories.

Adventure games still seem to improve by leaps and bounds. With each new game, I feel like I'm experiencing technology hard at work. Zork: Nemesis was what adventure games should be all about: beautiful worlds to discover, an interesting plot, an original musical score and sound effects—all giving you what these games are designed for in the first place: adventure!

Adventure games will always be entertainment icons for our future.

Troy Ziel
San Jose, CA

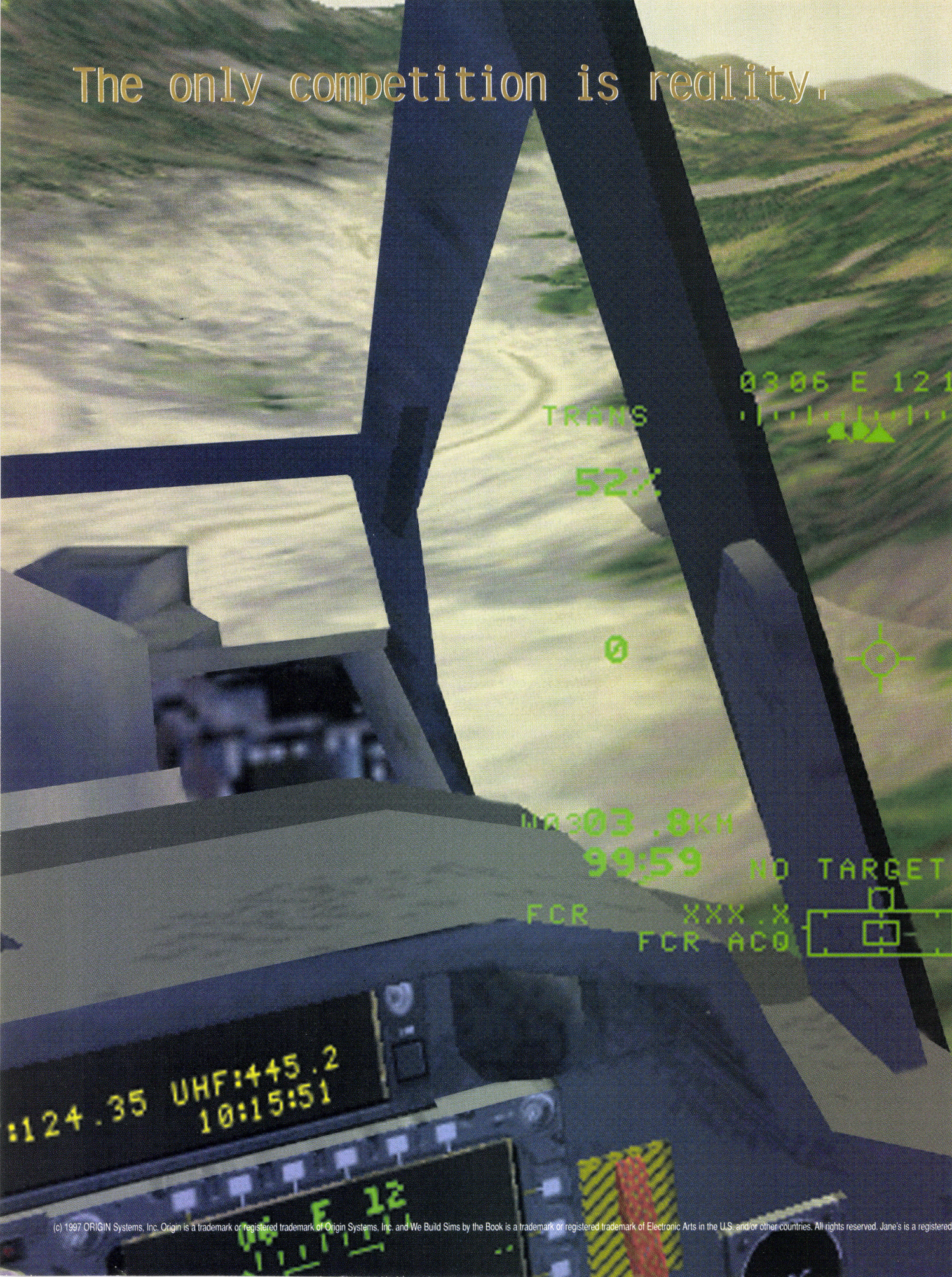
Adventure games should focus more on their storyline and less on puzzles. They should take me on an adventure! Exploring new lands, galaxies, and dimensions—that should be the main focus, not brain-teasers with a few rooms thrown in between just to hook things together. Hook me with the story. Draw me deeper and deeper into the game so I want to work and fight my way to the end. Get me emotionally involved with the game world and characters. Now that's a game!

TMC
Via email

I think adventure-game developers need to reach and engage the potential market of older gamers and women. I am a 51-year-old woman with a master's degree. I saw Myst at the Digital World expo in Los Angeles several years ago, and it got me interested in adventure games. I'm sure there are a lot of people in my age group who would love this genre, if they knew what it really was.

I hope that adventure games just get stronger. I really liked the stories in Amber, the Gabriel Knight series, and Bad Mojo. Other games, like Obsidian, are just fascinating in and of themselves.

Jean Alexander
Rancho Palos Verdes, CA



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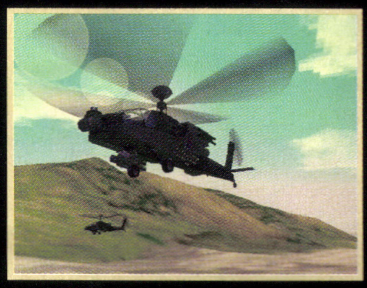
LONGBOW 2



THE THRILL OF PILOTING THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS COMBAT HELICOPTER COMES TO LIFE. LONGBOW 2 DRAWS YOU INTO THE WORLD OF DEADLY MISSIONS WITH 3D GRAPHICS THAT WILL BLOW YOUR MIND. FROM THE COCKPIT, LOCK YOUR HELLFIRES ON A LINE OF TANKS AND BLOW THEM AWAY WITH THE PUSH OF A BUTTON. YOUR BUDDY IN THE KIOWA IS GOING IN FOR RECON. THAT EXPLOSION YOU SAW WAS THE BLACKHAWK DOOR GUNNER WASTING AN ENEMY SUPPLY BATTALION. EVERY MISSION IS DIFFERENT, BUT ONE THING NEVER CHANGES — YOU'RE SWEATING BULLETS BECAUSE THIS IS REAL WAR.

[ACTUAL GAMEPLAY SCREENS]

ACTUAL GAMEPLAY SCREEN

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TEEN
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GAMEWIRE

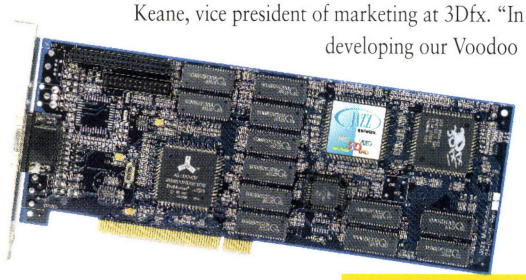
Voodoo Rush Under Pressure

Voodoo Rush owners may have problems running Jedi Knight in anything but SVGA.

No doubt about it, 3Dfx is at the top of the heap in 3D PC gaming. But the exposure of being an industry leader with an increasing customer base often comes hand-in-hand with higher consumer expectations. In the last few months, 3Dfx has experienced growing questions about how well its Voodoo Rush chipset compares to the original Voodoo.

To be fair, 3Dfx designs and markets 3D video technology that other companies such as Diamond, Intergraph, and Canopus implement in their 3D video boards. But just as Intel has reaped the benefits resulting from high-profile marketing and public-relations campaigns, that same name-recognition makes it easy for consumers to point their fingers when they're dissatisfied with a product using Intel technology. With 3Dfx's Voodoo Rush chipset, that's exactly what's been happening.

"What we learned was that our original pass-through Voodoo technology was very successful, and lots of people wanted to own it," says Andy Keane, vice president of marketing at 3Dfx. "In developing our Voodoo Rush chipset, we came up with a variation of our 3D technology that could be married to other companies' 2D technology on one card. But Voodoo Rush isn't exactly the same thing as Voodoo."



Is there a Voodoo Rush card in your future?

Despite months of claims that Voodoo and Voodoo Rush were "equivalent," Keane says that 3Dfx is now openly admitting that equivalent is not the same as identical. The change in posture is in response to a vocal band of consumers, who purchased 2D video cards that came with a Voodoo Rush daughtercard attached. Those gamers soon discovered problems with running GLQuake, which has quickly become a litmus test for 3D PC gaming. At best, the Voodoo Rush 3D ran GLQuake an average of five frames per second slower than Voodoo pass-through cards. At worst, the gamers in question had trouble running GLQuake at all.

Keane says the poor performance is due to the fact that id built GLQuake to simultaneously run Z-buffering and alpha blending functions to achieve its 3D effects—something that few 3D games actually try to do. Unfortunately, Voodoo Rush isn't as adept at handling the workload as standard Voodoo.

continued on page 44

COVERT OPS

Duke Forever Update

Changes are afoot at 3D Realms, as the Duke Nukem Forever crew toils toward the game's 1998 release. As with Ion Storm's Daikatana, the original plan to use the Quake engine has been shelved in favor of Quake II underpinnings. According to George Broussard, 3D Realms' president, the entire Duke team was shipped off recently to visit id and learn more about the Quake II engine. Expect DLL support, model interpolation, client/server multiplay, and full 3Dfx support. As for the rest of the game, Broussard has gone on record that the sequel will retain super-interactive environments, Duke's voice and humor, strippers, and the other characteristics that made the original Duke successful. Forever will likely trump Nukem for bawdiness, as it's set in and around Las Vegas.

Duke Nukem Forever in ultra-3D.

Playmates Targets Action

It seems there's continued action in the Descent genre. Both Terracide and G-Police have been marketed at the Descent crowd, and now Playmates has Digital Dialect's Adrenix in the pipeline for an early 1998 release. Although 3D acceleration will be on board for the game, Digital Dialect says smooth operation in 640-by-480 SVGA resolution on P120s is a major design goal. To help distinguish the game from Descent, a beefier mission-gameplay model will be employed, with specific tasks and rewards. Gamers play an ex-mercenary looking for his girlfriend, who's been kidnapped by over-zealous biotech researchers in need of human guinea pigs.

Playmates shoots for the Descent crowd.

Battlezone Regenerates

Those of you who loved the original Atari vector-graphics arcade game will be happy to know that the franchise is getting a new lease on life at Activision. Due out early next year, the new Battlezone uses a variation on the Mech 2 engine

At the Wire

Dominion Gets a Face-lift

Not only has Dominion found a new home at Ion Storm due to reunification with its developer, Todd Porter, but the game—now called Dominion Storm—will also get a host of new features before its January release. Porter's squad is adding new vehicles and revising old ones, increasing map sizes, adding indigenous creatures, and tweaking the code. Porter says there were more than 500 bugs plaguing the game when it was purchased by Ion Storm for $1.8 million last September. By early October, there were fewer than 30 bugs remaining, he says. Porter estimates the overhaul will end up costing approximately $1 million.

Ion preps Dominion for combat.

3Dfx Sues Sega

Although it may be the darling of PC 3D-technology companies, it's no secret that 3Dfx has had designs on arcade and console platforms. One major ally in this ambition had been Sega, which planned to use 3Dfx technology in its post-Saturn console-game system; the company even invested millions of dollars in 3Dfx. Earlier this year, Sega abruptly bounced 3Dfx out of its plans in favor of the PowerVR clan of NEC and VideoLogic. That didn't sit well with 3Dfx, which promptly slapped a $100 million lawsuit on Sega and NEC. 3Dfx is worried that NEC, a main competitor, will now have access to 3Dfx's proprietary technology; it also believes that Sega canceled a binding contract. Sega maintains that it respects proprietary rights but has not made a specific statement regarding breach-of-contract allegations.

X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter Mission Pack

Quake isn't the only game that erred in favor of multiplay gaming. LucasArts followed the same road with X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter—earning high praise for a great multiplayer space-combat game but general dismay at the lack of single-play action. The Balance of Power expansion disc will attempt to fix this shortcoming. Pilots can join either Rebel or Imperial squadrons to complete a collection of linked missions. The missions can be completed in solo mode or in cooperation with other players. Four pilots are supported over the Internet, eight over a LAN. LucasArts is also adding new melee missions and a B-Wing rebel fighter.

New missions for X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter.

E3 Schlepps Back to Los Angeles

After suffering much public abuse from the game community for moving the 1997 Electronic Entertainment Expo to Atlanta, the Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA) has decided to move the show back to Los Angeles in 1999, where it's scheduled to remain for at least five years. The 1998 show will run May 13–15 in Atlanta. The IDSA had moved the show for more exhibit space, but the Los Angeles Convention Center has since added more square-footage, and

continued on page 43

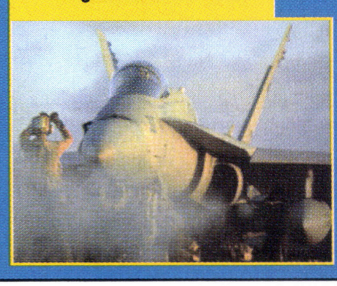
Battlezone: A classic gets updated.

that is so reworked that the producers want to call it brand-new—but we won't. Battlezone also draws on the Dark Reign AI for its computer opponents. The setup is a rewrite of history in *X-Files* fashion, where the space race between the US and the USSR was born in a competition to harvest a powerful alien metal on the moon and Mars. Gameplay is a mixture of first-person action and strategy-resource management. Either US or Soviet sides can be played, and plans call for up to 30 units. Battlezone will support both 3Dfx and D3D acceleration, and possibly force-feedback sticks as well.

I-Magic Bombs Away

The aeronautical bunch at Interactive Magic has another fighter sim in the works. This time out, they're cloning the Navy's F-18 Hornet attack jet. Details are sketchy, but expect random air-defense and ground-attack missions, territory based on actual satellite data, and eight-person multiplayer LAN and Internet matches. Figure on this bird to land in June, after which I-Magic has an A-10 Warthog sim planned.

Next up for take-off at I-Magic is an F-18 sim.



European Invasion

There's a lot brewing under cover on the other side of the pond that could be heading Stateside next year. As you might expect, there are loads of soccer games in development, most of which are never likely to see the light of day over here. Two that *are* likely to appear are from EA—FIFA '98 and FIFA: Road to the World Cup. More tantalizing is Outcast, developed by a new Belgian design house called Appeal. Introducing a new action-hero by the name of Cutter Slade, Outcast is a third-

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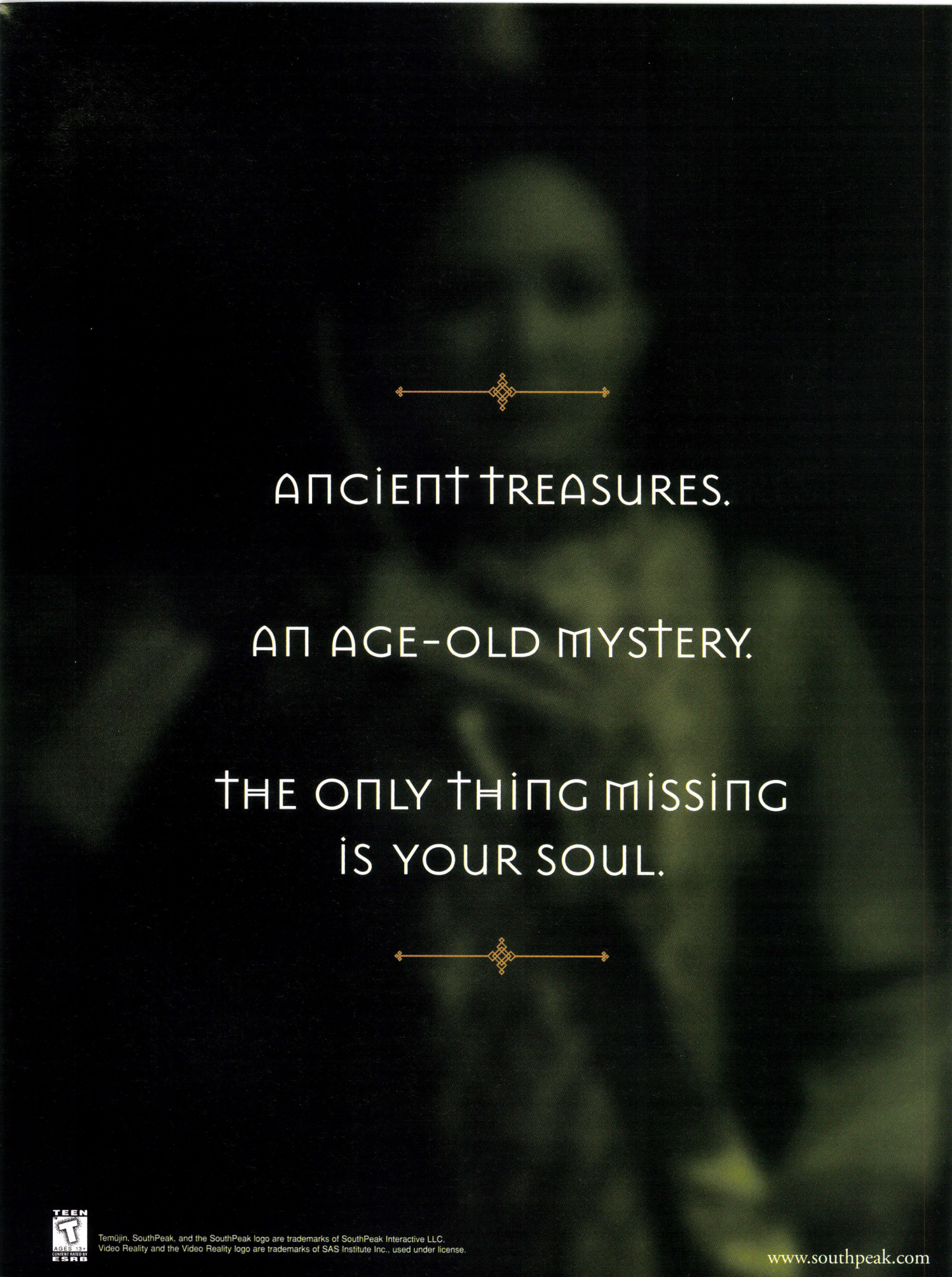

TEEN
AGES 13+
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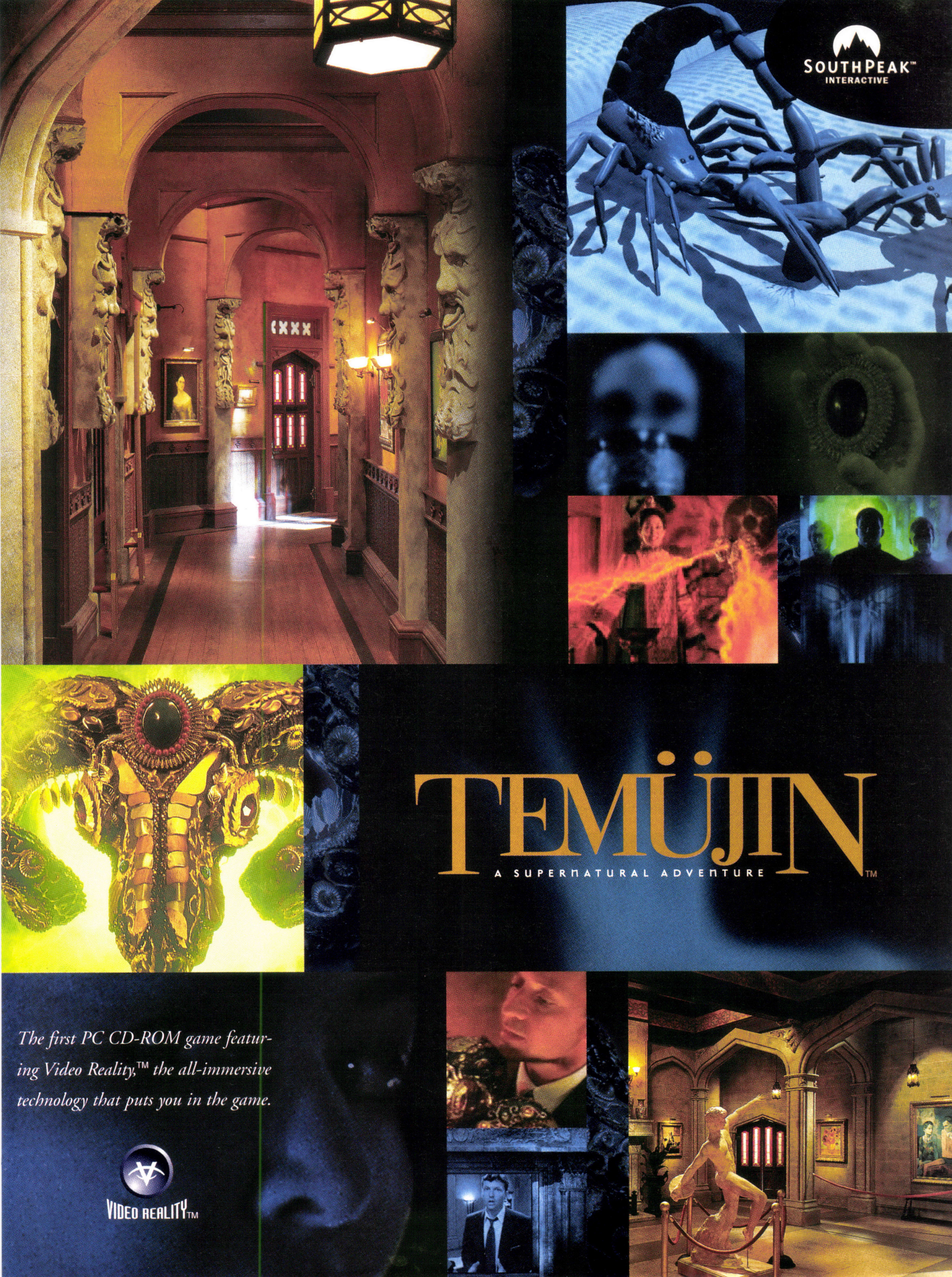
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Power Grabs

GAME BYTES

Squad! Form Up

Board wargamers, take note: Big Time Software is partnering with Avalon Hill to create a new PC version of the venerable classic Squad Leader. Big Time isn't revealing many details, but the World War II tactical combat game will be based mostly on Advanced Squad Leader, and it'll be turn-based, not real-time. Expect Internet and play-by-email multiplayer options, plus a hotseat human-against-human multiplayer mode and a scenario editor.

Overboard Name Gets Plank

Remember Overboard, the delightful pirate game showed off by Psygnosis at this year's E3? Well, someone else must have the name locked up, because Psygnosis just changed it to Shipwreckers. The game should be in stores by the time you read this. Shipwreckers features a top-down perspective and sets players off to rid the seas of a fleet of pirate vessels.

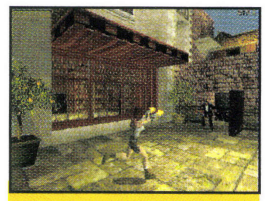
CH Changes Axis

For some reason, CH Products seems defensive about specialized input devices like throttles and racing wheels. The company is trumpeting a smaller, $59.95 four-button generic joystick called the Gamestick that it hopes will appeal to average gamers looking for an all-in-one purchase. We'll see if Microsoft's SideWinder design crew gets nervous.

MicroProse connects with Kalisto.

MicroProse Drafts Kalisto

In what seems to be a race with Activision and Eidos to see which publisher can lock up the largest stable of developers, MicroProse has signed another prominent design house, Europe's Kalisto, to a worldwide distribution deal. Neither company is saying how many Kalisto games will fall under the agreement, but Dark Earth, Ultim@te Race, Nightmare Creatures, and The Fifth Element will all carry the MicroProse label.



Lara will run without Toby Gard and Paul Douglas.

Tomb Raiders Snagged

Interplay wants to get in on some Lara-style action so much that it's setting up a new development company for two principals from the original Tomb Raider design team. Lead graphic artist Toby Gard and programmer Paul Douglas have left Core and are setting up Confounding Factor in West England. Their first game for Interplay is tentatively called Leviathan and won't see release until sometime in 1999. Interplay gets exclusive distribution rights to Confounding Factor games.

Warren Spector, producer of Crusader, has moved on to Ion Storm.

Spector Docks at Ion

Ditching duties as executive producer at Looking Glass, Warren Spector has joined Ion Storm. Spector—who was also the producer of Crusader: No Remorse at Origin—will lead a new Austin, Texas, studio for Ion, and says he will be working on a "RPG/adventure game with more action elements." The game will be built upon the Quake 2 engine, and the project has a budget of $2.5 million. Spector says he wants lots of NPCs and deep simulation features. Although there'll be puzzles, Spector says they will be problem-solving, not object-based. As for the Quake 2 engine, Spector says, "It's an amazing relief to be starting a game knowing the technology is already in place."

Some Psygnosis design work is heading Stateside.

Psygnosis over San Francisco

UK-based Psygnosis is branching out its design operations by opening up a new studio in San Francisco with six development teams and an internal testing department. This will be the first time the developer has set out to produce games in the US, and the new studio will be dedicated to creating original 3D-accelerated games for high-end PCs. It hasn't yet been announced what titles they'll concentrate on first. Psygnosis now has 30 development teams in eight offices, including one in Paris.

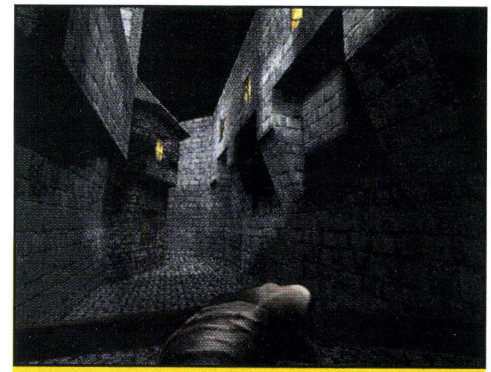
Activision Moves on Redline

Redline, the design works headed by James Anhalt (MechWarrior 2) and Ron Millar (Diablo, consultant on Dark Reign), has signed on with Activision. As part of the deal, Redline gets a capital infusion from Activision's equity investment, while the publisher gets to distribute Redline's first three games. First up in 1998 will be an RPG/strategy game called 3rd World. Redline is based in Costa Mesa, California, not far from Blizzard's studio.

This guy is from an upcoming Redline game called 3rd World.

Looking Glass Takes Flight

The developer behind the Flight Unlimited franchise is taking its business to Eidos, which will publish Looking Glass' upcoming games. In addition to Flight Unlimited II, Eidos will distribute the long-awaited, action/RPG-themed The Dark Project. Also in the works is a sci-fi action game tentatively called Junction Point, which shares The Dark Project's engine. Junction Point is scheduled for a fall 1998 release.



The Dark Project will get the Eidos treatment.

—George T. Chronis

CommLink

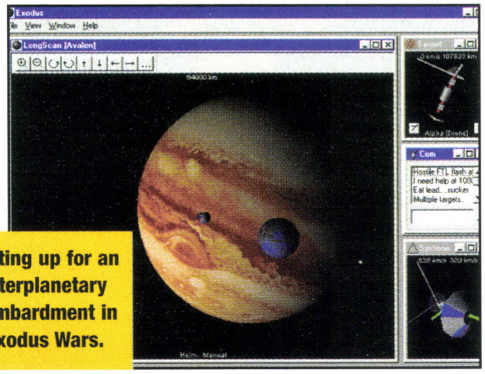
Kesmai is gunning for AOL.

Kesmai on AOL's Tail

Not only did AOL anger a bunch of its online-gaming subscribers when it changed the pricing structure of its Games Channel to $1.99 per hour, the online service also dismayed online-gaming pioneer Kesmai. So angered is Kesmai that it's filed suit against AOL in the US District Court of Virginia (the state where AOL is based), alleging that AOL is violating federal anti-trust laws. Kesmai is unhappy that AOL is channeling all of its online-gaming features to WorldPlay, the service that used to be called the ImagiNation Network, which AOL purchased last year. Kesmai believes that AOL wrongly redesigned its Games Channel to suggest that Kesmai games are WorldPlay games. Kesmai claims that AOL is forcing it to be "subsumed" under a competitor—the alternative being a lack of access to AOL subscribers. Following AOL's acquisition of CompuServe, Kesmai estimates that the service will control more than 80 percent of the online marketplace, making it a monopolistic enterprise. AOL had not responded to the suit at press time.

Exodus Reaches Net

JAGware has been testing its new online-only, real-time space-combat game Exodus Wars since September at **www.jagware.com/exodus**. Each player in Exodus Wars gets control of one fusion-powered starship. Star pilots can battle on their own or join up with other players online to form fleets. Weapons include gamma-ray lasers and fusion warhead missiles. The battlefield is a million square kilometers in a gas-giant solar system full of moons and asteroids. JAGware intends to add new weapons and ship designs on a regular basis to keep battles fresh. Players can outfit their ships for different purposes.



Setting up for an interplanetary bombardment in Exodus Wars.

Pay for Play

TEN wants to go pro and start its own official online-gaming league—one that'll pay top-seeded players to play. Don't expect the Professional Gamers League (PGL) at **www.pgl.net** to rival the likes of the new pro women's basketball league any time soon, but TEN seems serious. By bagging big-name sponsors such as AMD, the PGL will pay out $250,000 in prizes its first year, and half of that will be in cash. There will be four PGL seasons per year, three months per season. Month one will be for player qualifications, and the next two months for actual combat. Both modem and "low-ping bastard" (LPB) categories will be offered, but all championship rounds will be played out in LPB games. Season one kicked off November 3 with individual matches and was totally Quake-based. Team competition will begin by the second season, as will Red Alert. Although all contenders are welcome in the qualifiers, TEN is actively courting high-profile players such as Thresh to participate.

PGL™ PROFESSIONAL GAMERS LEAGUE

TEN wants to go pro.

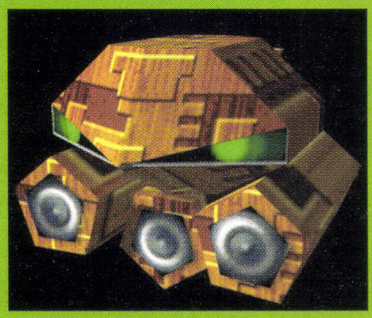
EA Matches Fighters on the Net

Heads up: Jane's has retrofitted its U.S. Navy Fighters, ATF, and NATO Fighters into one huge package called Fighters Anthology, greatly enhancing Internet match-making in the process. The new Internet components should make setting up cross-country dogfights much easier than before. A browser/Net interface is also included on the instrument panel for chats with other airmen, a game-feature setup, and team selection—all accessible through Microsoft Internet Explorer. At press time, Jane's doesn't plan to support Netscape Navigator, but support for Netscape's Communicator is in the works. When Fighters Anthology makes it to your home cockpit, log on

GAME BYTES

Descent Everything

Remember how much you looked forward to Final Doom? Interplay is working



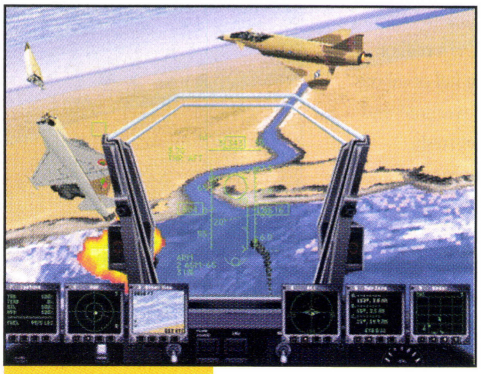
from the same idea to bring you the $19.99 Descent I & II: The Definitive Collection. Included on three CDs are every Descent I and Descent II package Interplay has released to date. You also get the Descent II: Mission Editor, Descent: Vertigo Mission Pack, and Descent: Levels of the World—plus a sneak peek at Descent III.

Animated MIB

This summer's big movie hit has spawned Men In Black: The Game. This Win 95 title from SouthPeak features animated versions of the characters played by Tommy Lee Jones, Will Smith, and Linda Fiorentino in the film. Gamers can choose to play as any one of the three characters. The actual storyline of Men In Black: The Game loosely follows the film's plot and offers a combination of action and adventure gameplay elements.

—George T. Chronis

Comm Link Cont.



EA makes online hook-ups easy.

to Jane's multiplayer Internet server at **www.janes.ea.com**. You'll have a choice of more than 70 planes from the earlier games, plus roughly 30 new mounts. All can be flown on 15 large real-world maps, and in six unique campaigns and 100 fast-action missions.

Empires Internet Demo

The trial version of Age of Empires is available at **www.microsoft.com/empires** and supports both single-player and multiplayer games. On the online front, random deathmatches can be set up using Internet Explorer to access the Zone at **www.zone.com**. The demo also has a number of the full game's campaign scenarios to play.

More Outlaws

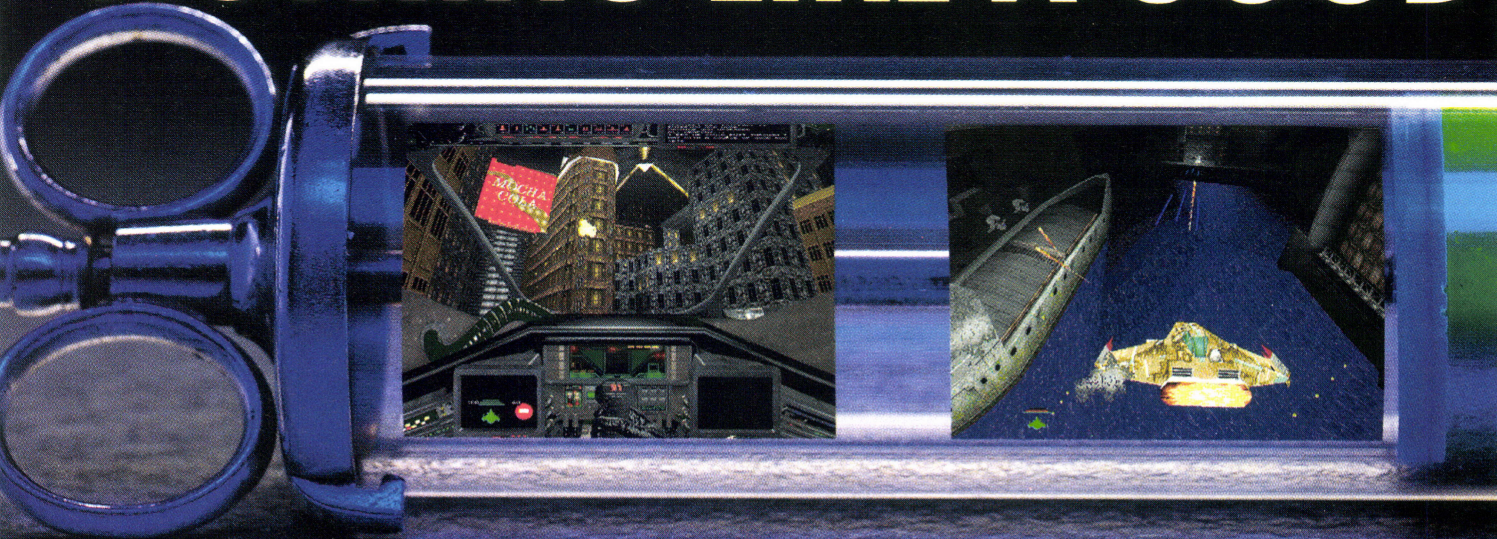
LucasArts has released new single-player and multiplayer missions for Outlaws. Called Handful of Missions, the new package includes Civil War, Wharf Town, Spanish Villa, and Ice Caves single-player missions. For multiplayer matches, there are two Civil War levels, an abandoned warehouse level, plus a waterfront and a gothic Western tower level. You can get the package for free from **www.lucasarts.com** or on CD-ROM if you send in a coupon available at computer-game stores.

FireTeam Goes Beta

On track for going live in February, Multitude will take its FireTeam cooperative combat game beta this month. FireTeam brings together two to eight players into a team setting, where each member must support the others to complete mission objectives against other teams. Individual combat will not be supported. Missions being tested now include CTF, team deathmatch (where the last team standing wins), and Gunball, a contest similar to football. *—George T. Chronis and Nash Werner*

FireTeam was in alpha testing through November.

NOTHING LIKE A GOOD



RATING PENDING RP ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE RATINGS BOARD

PLAYMATES INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT PIE

First, there's the rush. Six degrees worth of it. Coming or going? Who knows. But you're at the center of this suicide mission, and whether you like it or not (you do), you know you've gotta get this rage out of your system, or you may end up in a splatter of self-destruction (not to mention world-wide devastation). With the weapons, raids, assassinations and other assorted chaos-candy of Adrenix thrashing your every molecule, you don't have to descend to get down and dirty. It'll take you in all directions at once. But that's you. All over the place.

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At the Wire cont.

E3 attendance suffered this year, falling from just under 60,000 attendees in 1996 to 37,100 in 1997.

Another 3Dfx Card

Up until now, Guillemot, the hardware side of Ubi Soft, has been best known for audio cards like the MaxiSound 64. That's going to change quickly, because the company plans to release a Voodoo pass-through 3D accelerator in the United States. The Maxi Graphics Gamer 3D has already been on sale in Europe and will debut in the States with a bundle that includes Sub Culture and Pod. The 4MB card will list for $199 and should be on store shelves by the time you read this.

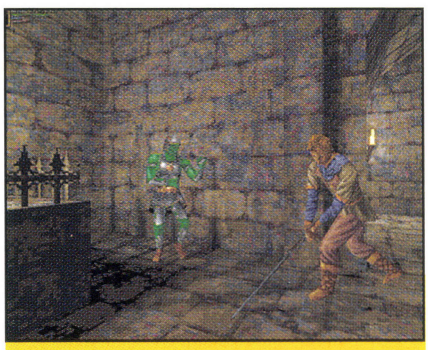
Psygnosis Preps Flight Sim

The folks at Psygnosis have their heads in the clouds. First we get G-Police, and now there's a World War II flight sim called Wings of Destiny. Pilots can fly for the Axis or Allies in a series of four campaigns. In one completely unique touch, each of the 50 mission-briefings is presented in period comic-book style. Aircraft choices are limited to only four aircraft: P-51, Spitfire, ME 109, and ME 262. Up to eight players can take flight in dogfight or squadron-versus-squadron modes over a LAN or the Internet. With the addition of computer pilots, up to 20 planes can take part in a dogfight. At press time, 3Dfx was the only 3D acceleration supported. And since the game features 32-bit color, anything short of a P200 would probably be ill-advised. Wings of Destiny ships next spring.

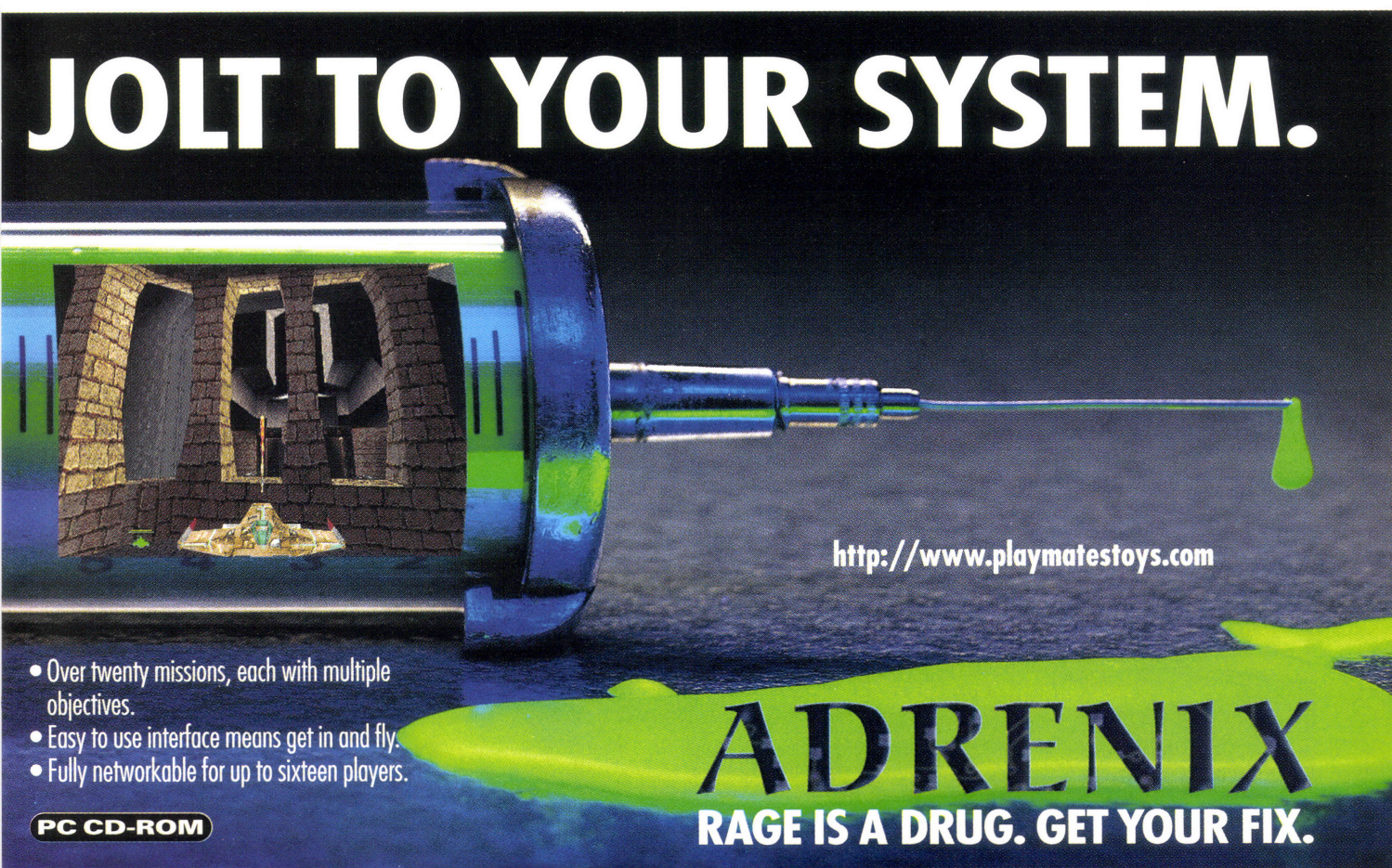
Look out—Jerry at 10 o'clock!

Scavenger Sues GT

Not much has been heard from Scavenger for almost a year, but the moribund developer—or at least its lawyers—has risen from limbo to file a $100 million lawsuit against GT Interactive. Scavenger alleges that GT reneged on agreements previously struck between the two companies. GT says the lawsuit has no merit and plans to protect its rights vigorously. Earlier this year, GT informed Scavenger, which had been working on Into the Shadows, that the former hadn't delivered games as promised. GT had invested heavily in Scavenger and had published the latter's Amok. —*George T. Chronis*



Scavenger's come out of the shadows.



Voodoo Rush Under Pressure cont.

"Initially, there was a set of driver issues that had to be addressed," Keane says. "But what you have to remember is that when Voodoo Rush was first implemented, there was no GLQuake, so we had to work out ways to speed up and smooth out performance after the fact."

In a move to satisfy early disgruntled Rush daughtercard owners, 3Dfx instituted a no-questions trade-in policy last September, whereby gamers who removed the Rush daughtercard and sent it to 3Dfx received a standard Voodoo pass-through add-on card in return.

The distinctions between Voodoo Rush and standard Voodoo are becoming more important. Instead of treating Rush as a fringe product, Intergraph, Hercules, and Jazz all released Voodoo Rush boards this fall (see hardware spotlights in this issue). Unlike earlier boards, these accelerator cards have Voodoo Rush built into the main board. Despite the fact that these all-in-one Rush boards are no swifter in the GLQuake frame-rate department, 3Dfx has no intention of switching out any of these 2D/3D all-in-one cards for pass-through Voodoo boards, Keane says.

Should gamers short on PCI slots consider one of these Voodoo Rush boards? Keane says 3Dfx stands behind Rush as a viable product that works well and offers extra features that standard pass-through Voodoo does not.

"In addition to putting Voodoo on one card with 2D video, Rush also supports resolutions larger than 640-by-480," Keane says. "In most 3D applications, Rush performs better than most other 3D chipsets."

Gamers want 3D accelerators because many new games, such as Resident Evil, are 3D-only.

But at Falcon Northwest Computers, president Kelt Reeves says he's not ready to recommend Voodoo Rush cards to customers.

"We get a lot of people who call us and ask about building a system with a Rush card," Reeves says. "A lot of people want Voodoo acceleration but are worried about running out of PC slots and would rather not use a pass-through accelerator. What I have to tell them is that we'll add any component they want, but from our own testing experience and results shared to us by our partners, Voodoo Rush cards aren't as reliable and problem-free as other accelerators."

Reeves says his recommendation to gamers who worry about too many PCI cards is to buy a new system with an AGP port, install an AGP video card, and then add a Voodoo pass-through card on top of that. With many new motherboards offering five PCI slots, this layout would leave four PCI slots for other peripheral cards.

Another factor to consider is that Voodoo II, with double the performance of today's pass-though cards, is supposed to hit the market between now and the middle of next year—something that gamers with 3Dfx on the brain might want to consider.

—George T. Chronis

COVERT OPS cont.

person perspective action-adventure game set in a universe parallel to our own. Appeal is shooting for high polygon counts and various other technical achievements. An early version delivered outdoor environments to be explored as Cutter is attacked by all manner of detailed, well-animated alien beasts. The natural elements played their part, too, with lens flare of the kind usually reserved for flight sims, and extensive, detailed backdrops adding a huge sense of scale to the settings. No word yet on a US publisher or release date.

Can Cutter stand up to Lara Croft in Tomb Raider 2?

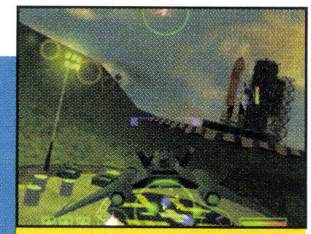
War of the Worlds

GT Interactive has signed the rights to use Jeff Wayne's classic *War of the Worlds* music and plotline as the basis for a new real-time action game. Set in Britain, the alien invasion needs to be thwarted on a large-scale tactical level, using real-world maps to plot defenses. At a more hands-on level, there are certain similarities to Cavedog's Total Annihilation, as the green and pleasant hills of England become the battlefields for real-time action. A release date hasn't been set.

Rage at the Pentium II

You knew it had to happen. Rage Software's early builds of Incoming are making the circuit installed on a Pentium II AGP system, with startling effect. Now Intel is using this helicopter-action shooter to demonstrate the power of the new CPU and AGP at various Intel corporate addresses. This shoot-'em-up looks to put arcade games in their place with some staggering graphical effects. Gameplay is fast-paced action shooting in the arcade tradition. Players collect powerups that they can trade in for more impressive and destructive weaponry. Arena combat lets you build teams to play against each other. The downside is that this machine-hungry game requires a 3D accelerator card (3Dfx or ATI) and a P133 minimum. Expect to get the full effect only on a Pentium II with 32MB of RAM and the now almost-mandatory 3Dfx accelerator. No publisher has yet been announced.

—George T. Chronis and Rob Smith



Don't look unless you have a Pentium II.

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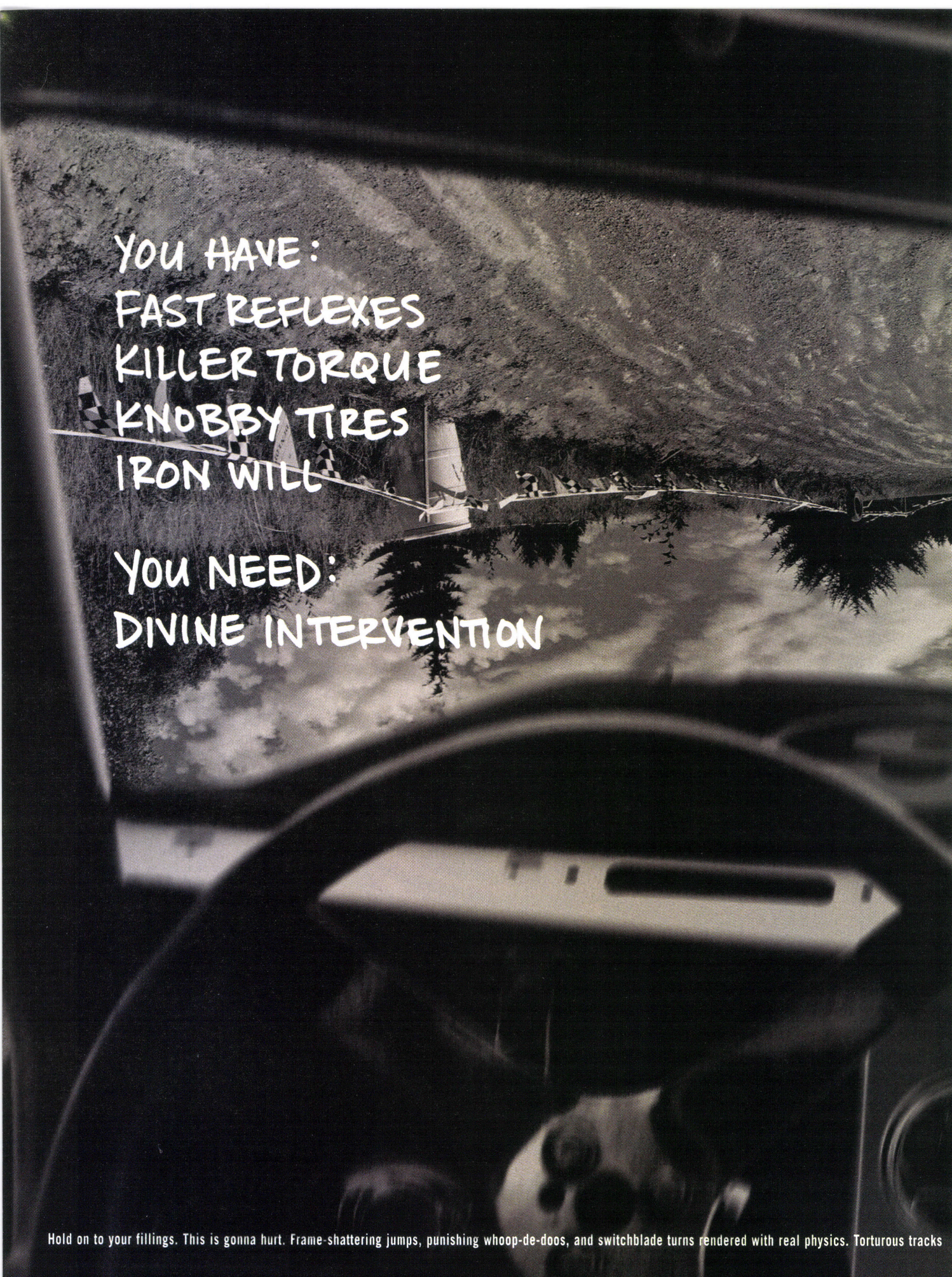
Availiable from October on PC CD-ROM and in an enhanced version on PC DVD



Hold on to your fillings. This is gonna hurt. Frame-shattering jumps, punishing whoop-de-doos, and switchblade turns rendered with real physics. Torturous tracks

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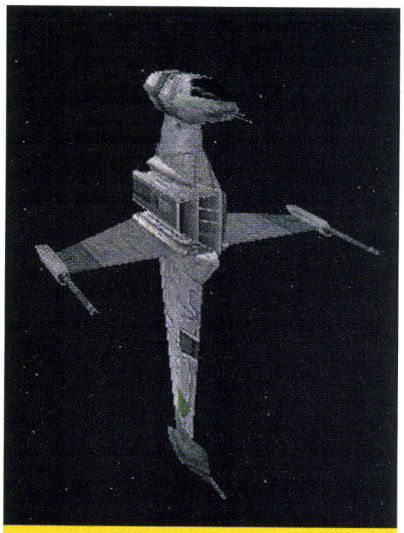
Toys

May the Bundle Be With You

Remember that MechWarrior 2/Microsoft SideWinder Christmas bundle a couple of years ago? Logitech does. That's why you're going to see the WingMan Extreme Digital joystick bundled with X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter this Christmas. The bundle should street near $59.95, which is $10 more than the joystick sells for by itself.



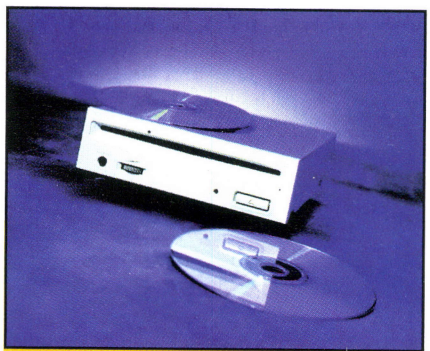
Logitech thinks you oughta pilot your B-Wing with a WingMan Extreme Digital.

Gateway Adds PowerVR

Still wanting to carve a computer niche into American living rooms, and realizing that 3D acceleration is all the rage, Gateway has added VideoLogic's Apocalypse 3Dx accelerator to its D6-300 Destination big-screen PC/TV. The system is based on a P266 CPU and comes with a 31-inch big-screen monitor. The whole setup will cost you in the $3,000-plus range at consumer electronics stores.

Slip It In

Tired of CD-ROM caddies and trays? Wish you could just slip your discs into the player the same way you can with CD players in cars? Now you can do just that, with Hi-Val's EasyLoad Slot 24x CD-ROM drive. This Enhanced IDE unit is based on a Pioneer mechanism and should street for around $129. Transfer rates max out at 3,600KB per second, and access times can get as low as 90ms.



No tray, no caddy.

Diamond Does Rendition

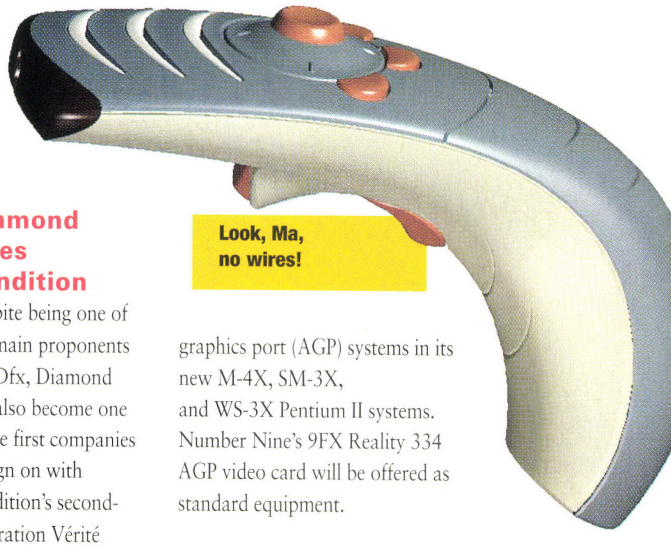
Despite being one of the main proponents of 3Dfx, Diamond has also become one of the first companies to sign on with Rendition's second-generation Vérité chipset. Although Rendition designed the V2200 as its main 3D accelerator chipset, it also cobbled together a less-expensive variation called the V2100 for motherboard makers to build into their boards. Diamond liked the price/performance ratio of the V2100 enough to build a low-cost Stealth II all-in-one 2D/3D video card around the chipset, even though it's not quite as fast as the V2200. Prices for the Stealth II could even drop below the $119 retail price. According to Rendition, the V2100 should more than double the 3D performance of the original V1000 chipset. Forsaken, Moto Racer, Half-Life, SODA Off-Road Racing, Terracide, and WipeOut XL come bundled with the Stealth II.

MLook This

In the "this may work for you department," computer maker Techmedia is producing a wireless input device called 3DZoneMaster. While fighting games such as Virtua Fighter 2 immediately jump to mind as likely candidates for a wireless hookup, Techmedia is not being that specific. Expect a large selection of predefined game sets to come along with Win 95 drivers. A programmable interface will also be included for those who like to customize. The 3DZoneMaster uses ultrasonic technology instead of infrared to achieve the wireless connection to the PC's serial port. Prices had not been set at press time.

AGP Continues to Spread

Quantex, the fourth-largest direct-channel seller of PCs, says it's going to ship its first accelerated graphics port (AGP) systems in its new M-4X, SM-3X, and WS-3X Pentium II systems. Number Nine's 9FX Reality 334 AGP video card will be offered as standard equipment.

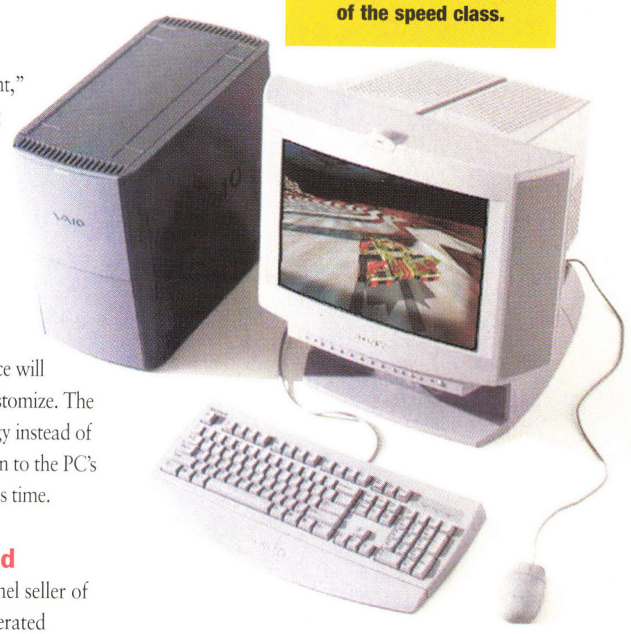


Look, Ma, no wires!

Sony's Big Guns

If you're one of those gamers who dogged Sony for debuting its VAIO line with a too little, too late P166, then step out of the way for the 300MHz Pentium II VAIO that Sony just began shipping. The PCV-240 not only includes the AGP port, but Sony has finally taken the video controller off the motherboard and replaced it with a separate 4MB ATI All-in-Wonder 3D Rage II PCI AGP card as well. The system also has a 32-bit ESS Maestro audio PCI controller instead of the on-board Yamaha audio used before. For your $3,299, you'll also get an internal Zip drive, 512KB of level-two cache, TV-out, a 6.4GB hard disk, a 24x CD-ROM drive, and a 33.6 DSVD modem.

—George T. Chronis



Sony goes to the front of the speed class.

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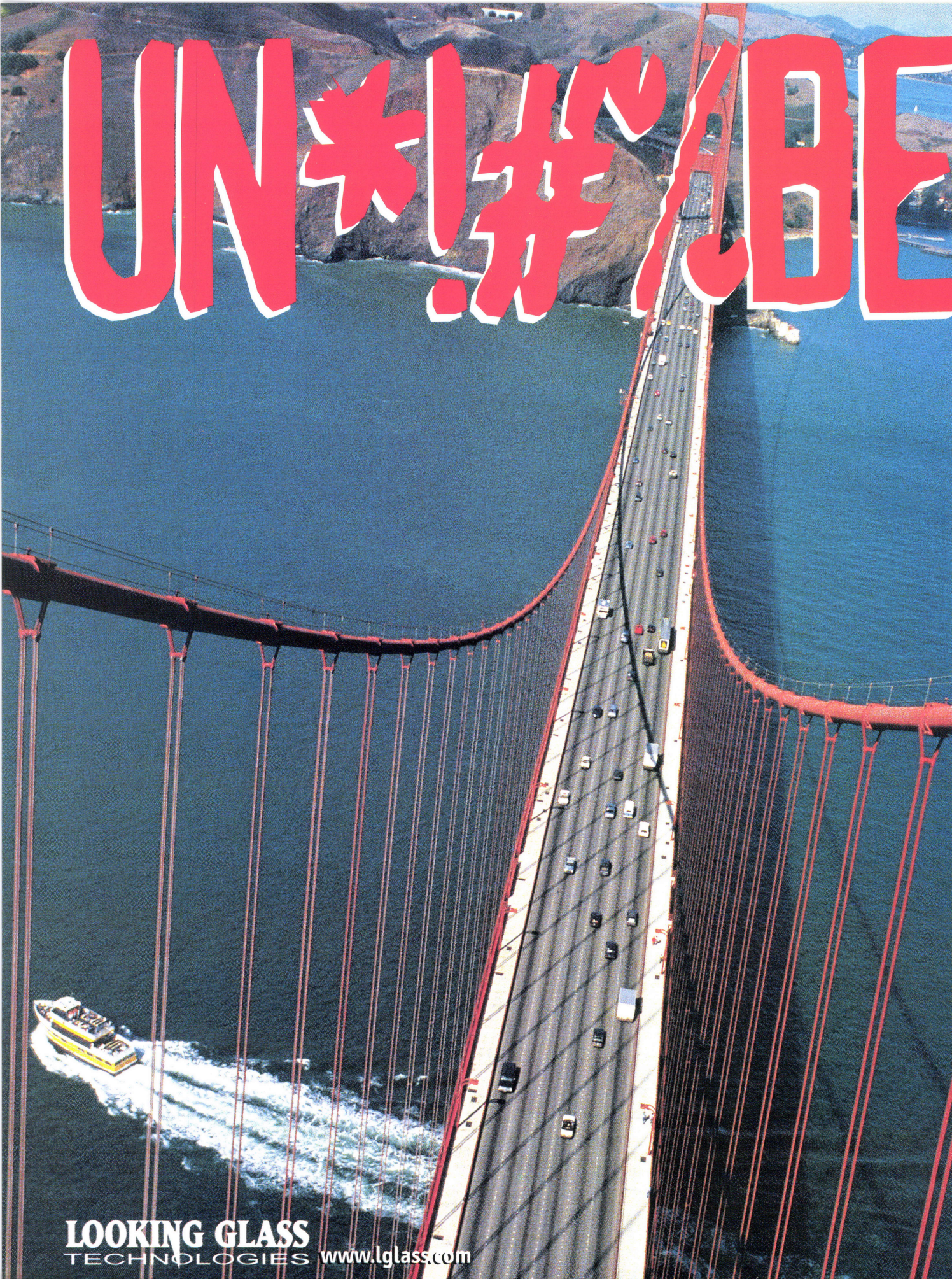
UNRIVALED
UNPARALLELED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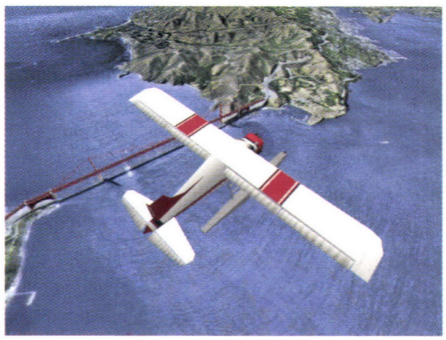

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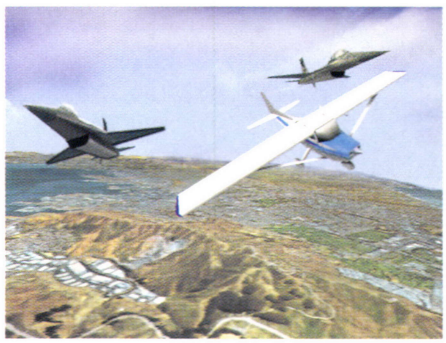
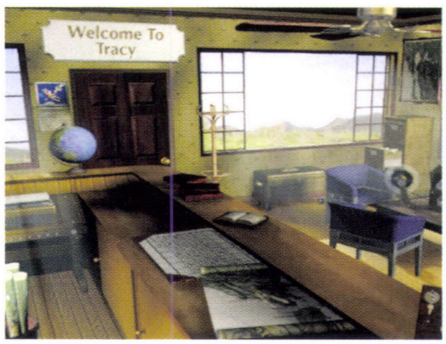


Test your skills attempting to evade a pair of F-16s that are trying to blast your butt out of restricted airspace.



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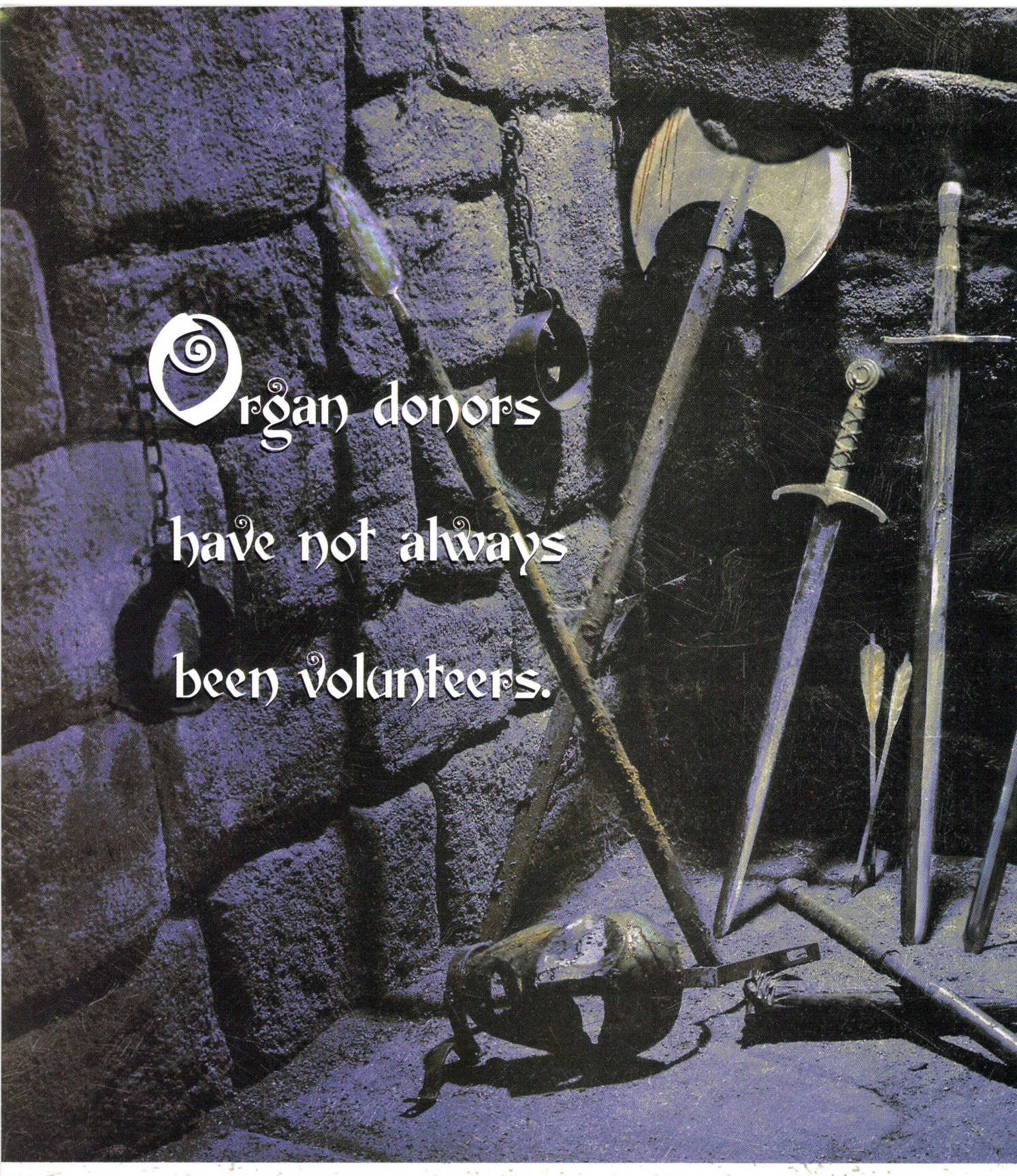

IAN LIVINGSTONE'S

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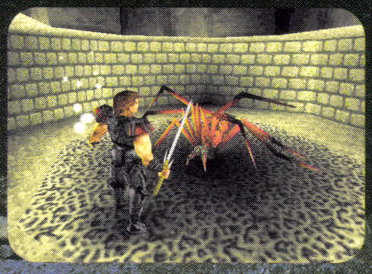

Master 13 horrific implements, including swords, hammers, muskets, magic spells and your bloody bare hands.

the grim fun you've missed. Now it's time for your bath. So plunge on in or look away, but make up your mind. While you still have a choice.

www.deathtrapdungeon.com

PC CD

PlayStation

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RULES MUST BE BROKEN. CATEGORIES MUST BE ERASED. EMPERORS MUST BE OVERTHROWN. THE STATUS QUO MUST BE SPANKED. AND CONTENTMENT MUST BE ROUTINELY TAKEN OUTSIDE AND SMACKED UPSIDE THE HEAD. IT'S A DIRTY JOB, BUT SOMEBODY HAS TO DO IT. AND WE'RE ALL READY TO APPLY FOR THE POSITION.

WE'RE ION STORM,℠ A BUNCH OF MISFIT, ZEALOT FREAKS WHO TRIED TO REST ON OUR PAST SUCCESSES BUT JUST DIDN'T FIND IT COMFORTABLE. THERE WAS A GAP OUT THERE. A BIG FAT VOID, AND WE WERE HELL-BENT ON FILLING IT. WE HAD ALL LIVED ON THE EDGE, BUT WE WERE READY TO JUMP OFF. SO HERE WE ARE. NEW NAME. NEW IDENTITY. NEW GAMES RATTLING THEIR CAGES, WAITING TO BE LET OUT.

INTO

JOHN ROMERO: LONG-HAIRED SMART-ASS KNOWN FOR HIS FAST FERRARI AND HIS UNCANNY ABILITY TO SING THE THEME SONG TO THE SPIDERMAN CARTOON REALLY, REALLY WELL. OH YEAH, THERE WAS ALSO THAT DOOM™ AND QUAKE® THING.

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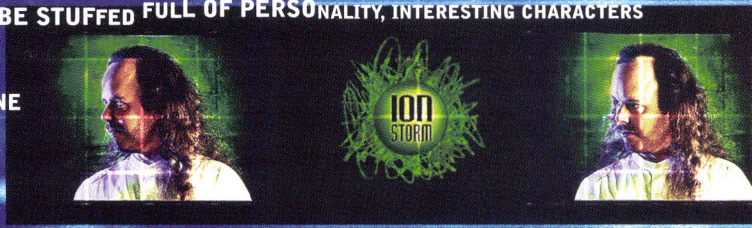
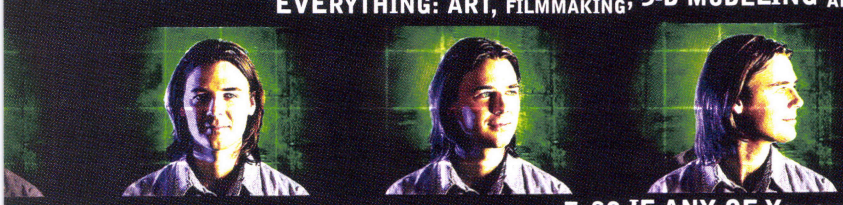


JERRY O'FLAHERTY: HIGHLY TALENTED PAINT MONKEY WHO GETS INTO EVERYTHING: ART, FILMMAKING, 3-D MODELING AND ANIMATION. NOT TO MENTION A BUNCH OF STUFF HE KEEPS UNDER HIS BED AND WON'T SHOW ANYBODY. HIS JOB DESCRIPTION NOW SAYS HE'S IN CHARGE OF ALL ART. SO IF ANY OF YOU OUT THERE ARE DOING ANYTHING EVEN SLIGHTLY ARTISTIC, IT NOW NEEDS TO BE SUBMITTED TO JERRY FOR HIS APPROVAL.



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THE EYE OF THE STORM

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TODD PORTER: A MANDOLIN-PLAYING, NATTY, GQ TYPE WHO THINKS GAMES SHOULD BE AS STYLISH AS HE IS. GOES AROUND SAYING THINGS LIKE "IN THE GAMING INDUSTRY, THERE IS NO TOMORROW." THEN TURNS AROUND AND DESIGNS THAT WAY. DANGEROUS WITH A HAMMERED DULCIMER WHEN HE'S BEEN OUT DRINKING.

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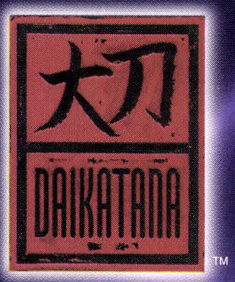

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Online-Game Connection

Compiled by Karen Eng and Corey Cohen

GAME SERVICES

www.mpgn.com — MPG-NET

Highlights: DragonGard, Empire Builder, Empires Dawn, Imperium, Junta, Kingdom of Drakkar, Operation Market Garden

Exclusives: All

Upcoming: Drakkar II, FiefQuest, Search and Destroy, Skulls, Bones and Buccaneers, Warlords of the Apocalypse

Rates: $9.95/mo.

AOL keyword: WorldPlay — WorldPlay

Highlights: Baldies Online, Claw, Darkness Falls, Heavy Damage, The Incredible Machine (TIM 3), MissionForce: CyberStorm, SET, Splatterball, Spunky's Shuffle, Trophy Bass 2, Warcraft II

Exclusives: All except Warcraft II and Splatterball

Upcoming: CyberPark, Fierce Harmony, Mysteries Unlimited, Poker, Shuffle Puck, Tetris Online

Rates: $1.99/hr. after allotted free time

www.2am.com — 2AM

Highlights: Alliance & Defiance, Animated Chess, Backgammon, Chain of Command, Checkers, The Invisible Hand, Poker Face: Dealer's Choice option, Total War

Exclusives: All

Upcoming: Nothing currently announced

Rates: $10/mo., or $30 to become a Founding Member (good until the end of the year)

www.gamesonline.com — ENGAGE games online

Highlights: Billboard Live!, Castles II: Siege & Conquest, Descent Online, Improvisation Online, Rolemaster: The Bladelands, Rolemaster: Magestorm, Splatterball, U.S. Chess Federation, Virtual Pool, Warcraft II

Exclusives: All but Warcraft II & Splatterball

Upcoming: Claw

Rates: rates vary depending on ISP

www.gamestorm.com — GameStorm

Highlights: Air Warrior II, Aliens Online, Classic Card Games, Harpoon Online, Legends of Kesmai, Multiplayer BattleTech: Solaris, Online Casino 2, Silent Death

Exclusives: All

Upcoming: Jack Nicklaus Online Tour

Rates: $4.95/mo.

www.dwango.com — DWANGO

Highlights: Descent II, Duke Nukem Plutonium Pack, G-NOME, HeliCOPS, NetMech, Shadow Warrior, Warcraft II

Exclusives: None

Upcoming: Age of Empires, CART Precision Racing, Microsoft Flight Simulator '98, Terracide, Total Annihilation

Rates: $.99/hr. through Internet Gaming Zone

zone.com — Microsoft Gaming Zone

Highlights: Age of Empires, Close Combat: A Bridge Too Far, Flight Simulator '98, Pictionary, Risk, Scrabble

Exclusives: Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II, Outlaws, X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter

Upcoming: Baseball 3D, Battleship, CART Precision Racing, Fighter Ace, Star Wars: Rebellion

Rates: Free, except Fighter Ace (rates for this game have not yet been announced)

www.kali.net — KALI

Highlights: Any IPX-compatible game (e.g., Big Red Racing, Command & Conquer, Descent II, Diablo, Duke Nukem 3D, MOO II)

Exclusives: None

Upcoming: Kali works with most new games that are IPX-compatible

Rates: $20 one-time fee

www.stargatenetworks.com — KAHN

Highlights: Any IPX-compatible game

Exclusives: None

Upcoming: Kahn works with most new games that are IPX-compatible

Rates: $15 one-time fee

www.mplayer.com — MPLAYER

Highlights: C&C: Red Alert, Diablo, MechWarrior 2, Panzer General Online Only, Quake (WinQuake, GLQuake, VQuake), Risk, Warlords III, War Wind

Exclusives: Q-Ball (Quake mod), Quake Tournament Play

Upcoming: Chasm, Dominion, iM1A2 Abrams, Links LS, Outlaw Racers, @Range, Star General, Take No Prisoners, Terracide

Rates: Free; Mplayer Plus: $29.95/yr. for access to special online tournaments and sponsored events

www.ten.net — ten

Highlights: Blood, C&C, C&C: Red Alert, Diablo, MOO II, Quake, Warcraft

Exclusives: AD&D: Dark Sun Online, Duke Nukem 3D Atomic Edition, EF2000, Panzer General, Shadow Warrior, Twilight Lands

Upcoming: Confirmed Kill, Dark Reign, Dark Sun Online 2.0, Falcon 4.0, Myth: The Fallen Lords, Prey, Top Gun, Total Annihilation, Wolfram

Rates: Flat rate: $19.95/mo.; hourly rate: $9.95/5 hrs. per mo., $1.95 each addtl. hr.

WORTHY GAME URLs

These days, a game can live forever. Add-ons, updates, and new information are available at a ton of cool fan sites, old and new. Here are some of our favorites; if you have some of your own, drop us a note at pcgamesletters@pcgames.com.

Myth: The Fallen Lords

www.bungie.com/myth

Bungie's official site has frequent status reports, a screen of the week, character anims, and more.

Shafe's Starcraft Source

www.shafe.com

The scoop on Starcraft.

The Top Secret Shadow Warrior Page

www.accel.net/accel/sw

Maps, tips, and ninja goodies galore.

Raistlin's Red Alert Command Post

www.geocities.com/Area51/9727/

Plenty of RA maps and downloads.

Heavy Gear Tech Bay

www.techbay.com

Cool info and screens for this upcoming sim.

Clear's Tomb Raider Page

www.azstar net.com/~olsen/ tomb_raider/

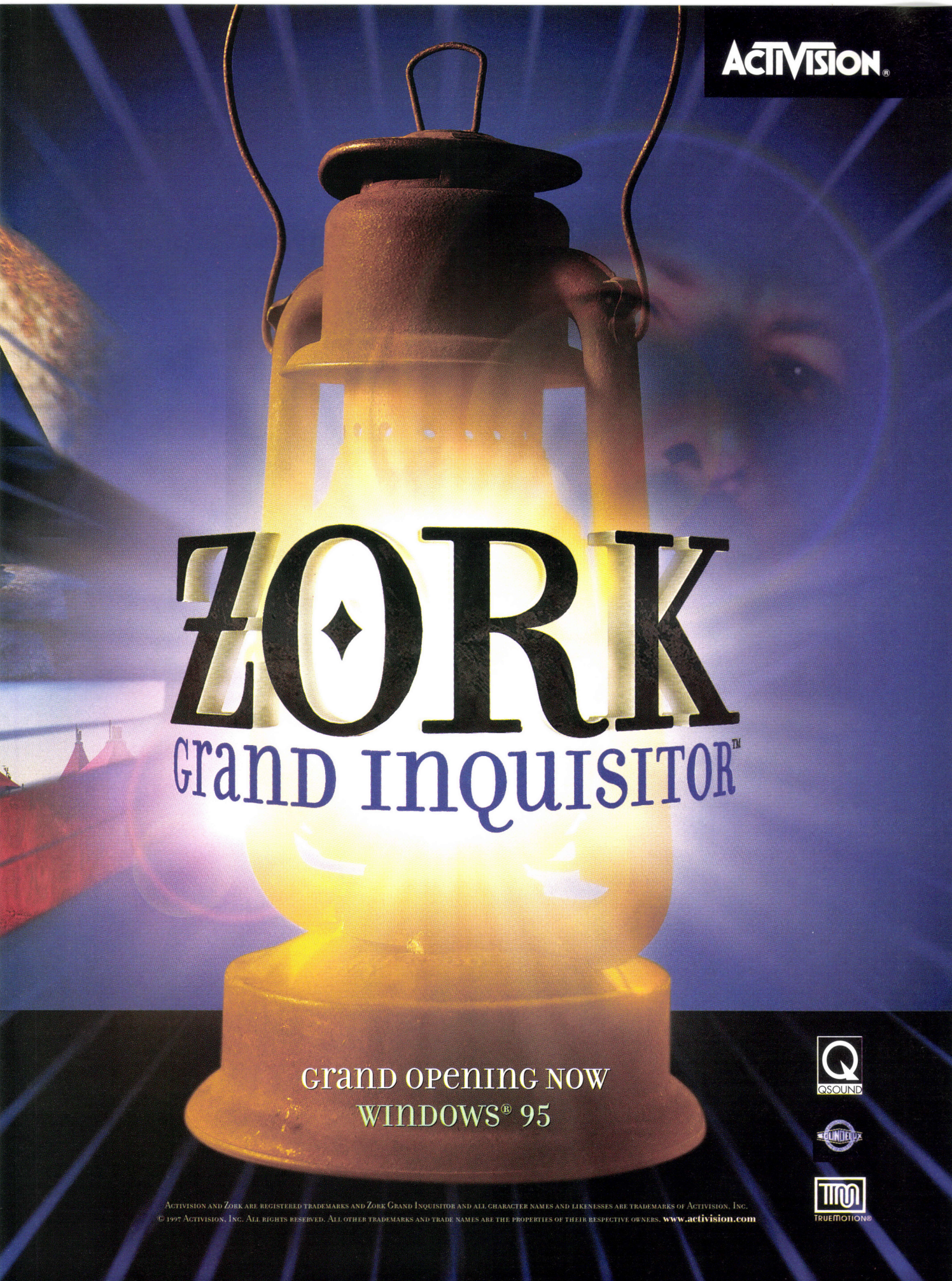
A "Lara-free" site dedicated to Tomb and Tomb 2.

Techno's Tiberium Sun Page

www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/ Castle/8076/index.htm

One of the few pages taking an early look at this eagerly awaited C&C entry.

ATTENTION ALL ADVENTURERS. BY EDICT OF THE GRAND INQUISITOR, THE GREAT UNDERGROUND EMPIRE OF ZORK HAS BEEN SEALED OFF AND THE PRACTICE OF MAGIC DECLARED PUNISHABLE BY TOTEMIZATION (A VERY BAD THING). ONLY A TRUE ADVENTURER CAN STOP THE GRAND INQUISITOR AND RESTORE MAGIC TO ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE. CAN YOU SAVE THE UNDERGROUND?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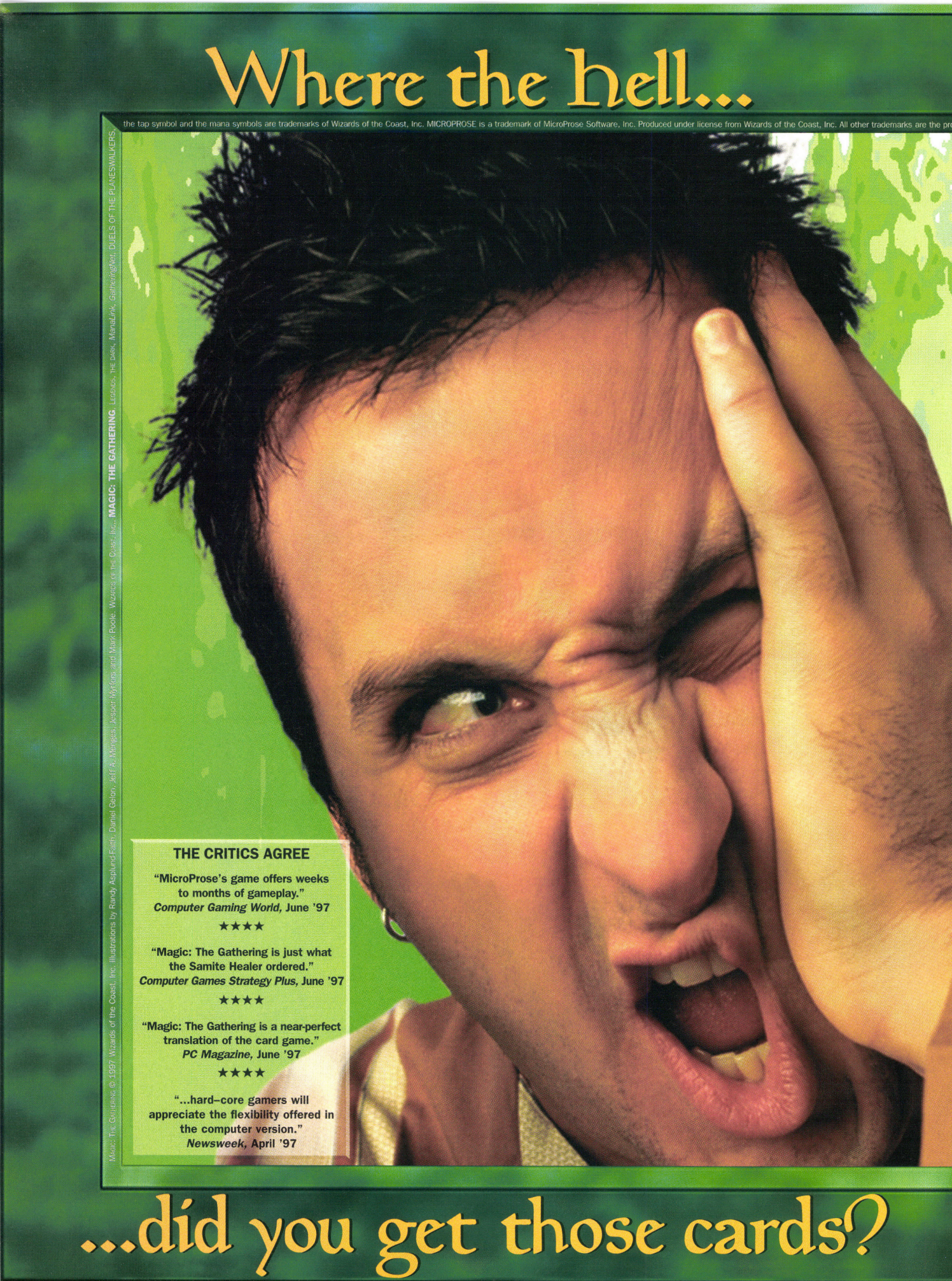
Where the hell...



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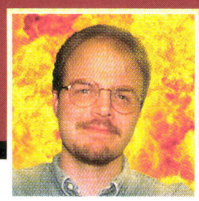
OFFICIAL Wizards OF THE COAST LICENSED PRODUCT

THE PLAYER



STEVE KLETT

Gamers' PCs are becoming obsolete faster than they can say "Merry @#%$!#% Christmas."

Bah, Humbug!

Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way...

As it's the holiday season, you probably think The Player's just humming this ageless carol while dreaming of all the cool games he's going to find under the Christmas tree this year.

Think again. That's not The Player—it's the corporate execs from the major PC vendors, singing their way to the bank the day after Santa's deliveries.

A ton of excellent games are on the way this season that all gamers will have on their wish lists. Most will incorporate all the latest technical bells and whistles—A3D, force feedback, 3D polygonal environments and characters, exquisitely texture-mapped palettes, and explosions and special effects that'll make Stallone, Schwarzenegger, and friends green with envy.

Now, make no mistake: The gameplay potential these titles hold has The Player salivating, but that's only because he knows he'll be able to play them—barely. For at least the next five minutes, his machine is fully souped up to handle anything Mr. Kringle cares to throw at it.

Even so, some of the coolest cutting-edge games reviewed in *PC Games*—Jedi Knight (Yeeessss!), Hexen II (also in this issue), Conquest Earth (in November's)—barely chug along at an acceptable level on his P200 MMX with 32MB RAM and an STB Velocity 128/Diamond Monster 3D 3Dfx video-card combo (currently top-of-the-line). His original P90 lasted a good two years before he was compelled to buy a P200, which now looks like it'll barely last a year—*consoles* live longer! The Player's on the bleeding edge of gaming-hardware ownership, and he's starting to see signs that even that's not good enough.

This makes him seriously question the quality of the gaming experience awaiting gamers who own slower machines. Just how happy are they going to be when they load up Quake 2, Half-Life, or Heavy Gear on Christmas day, only to realize they now have to play in 320-by-200 on their year-old P166, P150, or P133?

Everyone's excited—The Player included—about the gaming potential that developments like AGP and USB and new 3D technologies present for the PC. However, in their zeal to become proficient with these new toys, developers are pushing the evolution of the PC to the absolute edge. And that means gamers' PCs are becoming obsolete faster than they can say "Merry @#!% Christmas."

Upgrading a PC to stay reasonably current with the latest software used to be akin to keeping a steady pace on a treadmill—and gamers were willing to sweat to keep up. Now that treadmill's running too fast and steep, and gamers are starting to fall off. Some try and get back on, a few take the express elevator to the top (i.e., buy a new top-of-the-line PC), and others get fed up and never come back.

Take this young *PC Games* reader, for example:

Computer companies should stop trying to be the best and should all work on the same level. Stop trying to make the most realistic game with the most realistic movement, and just make the games that most game players can run on the systems they have. I could understand making games that run best on a Pentium 166, but that can also run on a minimum of, say, 100, or even 90.

Now, he's tomorrow's potential hardcore gamer. How's that saying go? "From the mouths of babes...."

It seems that with each new game that hits the shelves, the developer is trying to trump the competition with technological sizzle. To be fair, there's a core group of gaming grognards in Usenet and the gaming press that'll criticize a game for not offering any technological advancement. Unfortunately, it appears lately that the development community is catering to this bunch, rather than considering the needs of Joe Average Gamer, like this reader:

Flashy graphics and FMV don't make games good. A GOOD GAME IS A FUN GAME. I still play Worms and Doom II because they're fun, not because they have super-duper MIP-mapped 3D, blah, blah....

The Player thinks technosnob gamers wouldn't scream so loudly if games offered more advances in the gameplay category than in the bells-and-whistles category. If this doesn't start to happen, we may find the gaming population shrinking rather than growing, as more people, like this reader, give up altogether:

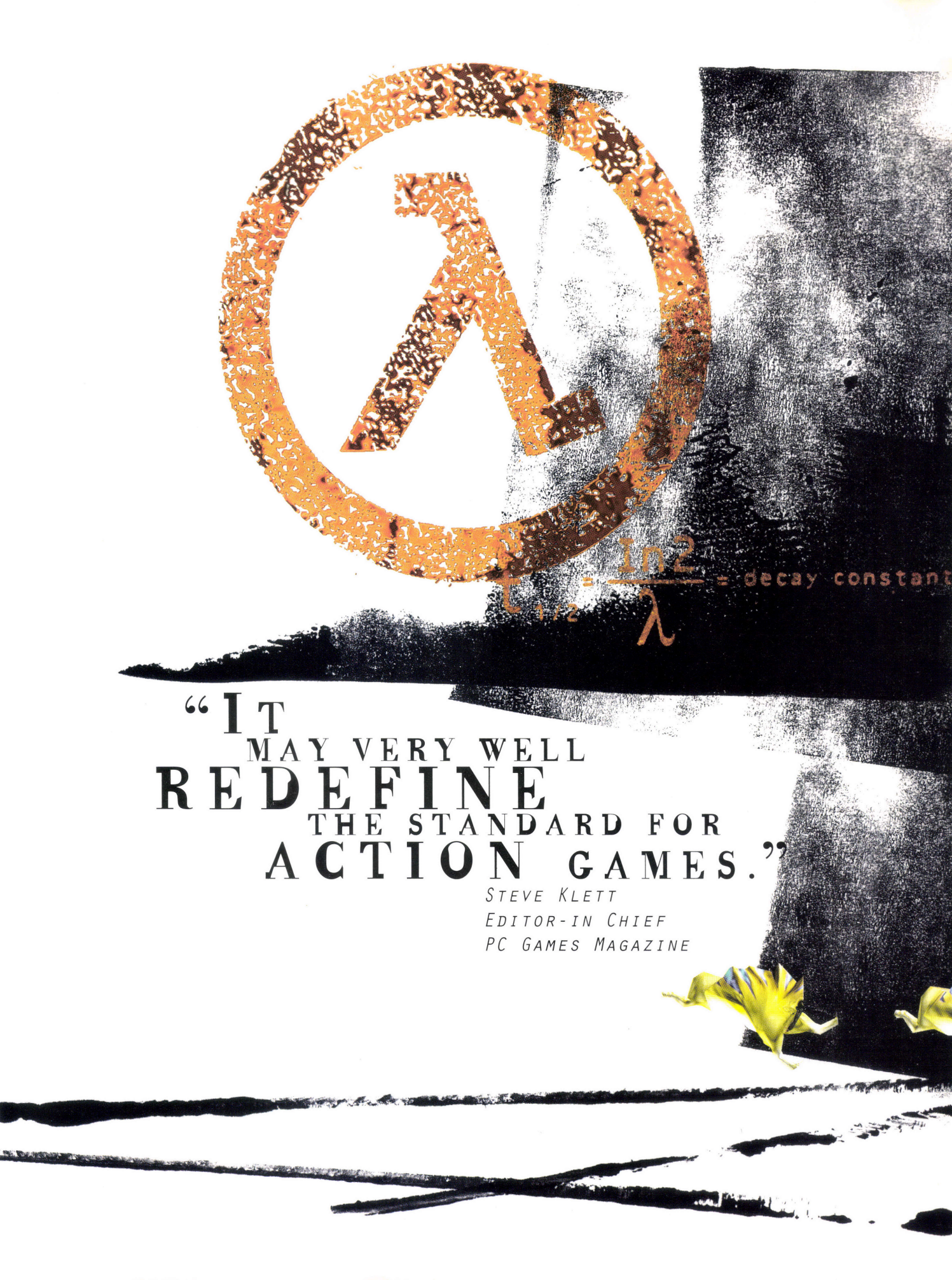
Over the last five months I've totally revamped my system. I bought 32MB of RAM, a new graphics card (Nitro3D), a new sound card (AWE64 Gold), and a new modem. Even with all that good stuff, my processor still lags behind.... My motherboard won't handle anything above a P120, so that's not even worth it. To get my system up to speed, I would need a new motherboard, a new case, and a new processor. I just can't afford it. So thanks for all the good magazines, boys, but I'm going to call it quits [sob]. No more computer games for me.

The Player fears this trend will only intensify over the coming year if developers don't pull in the reins a bit.

...Oh what fun it is to ride on the PC upgrade sleigh.

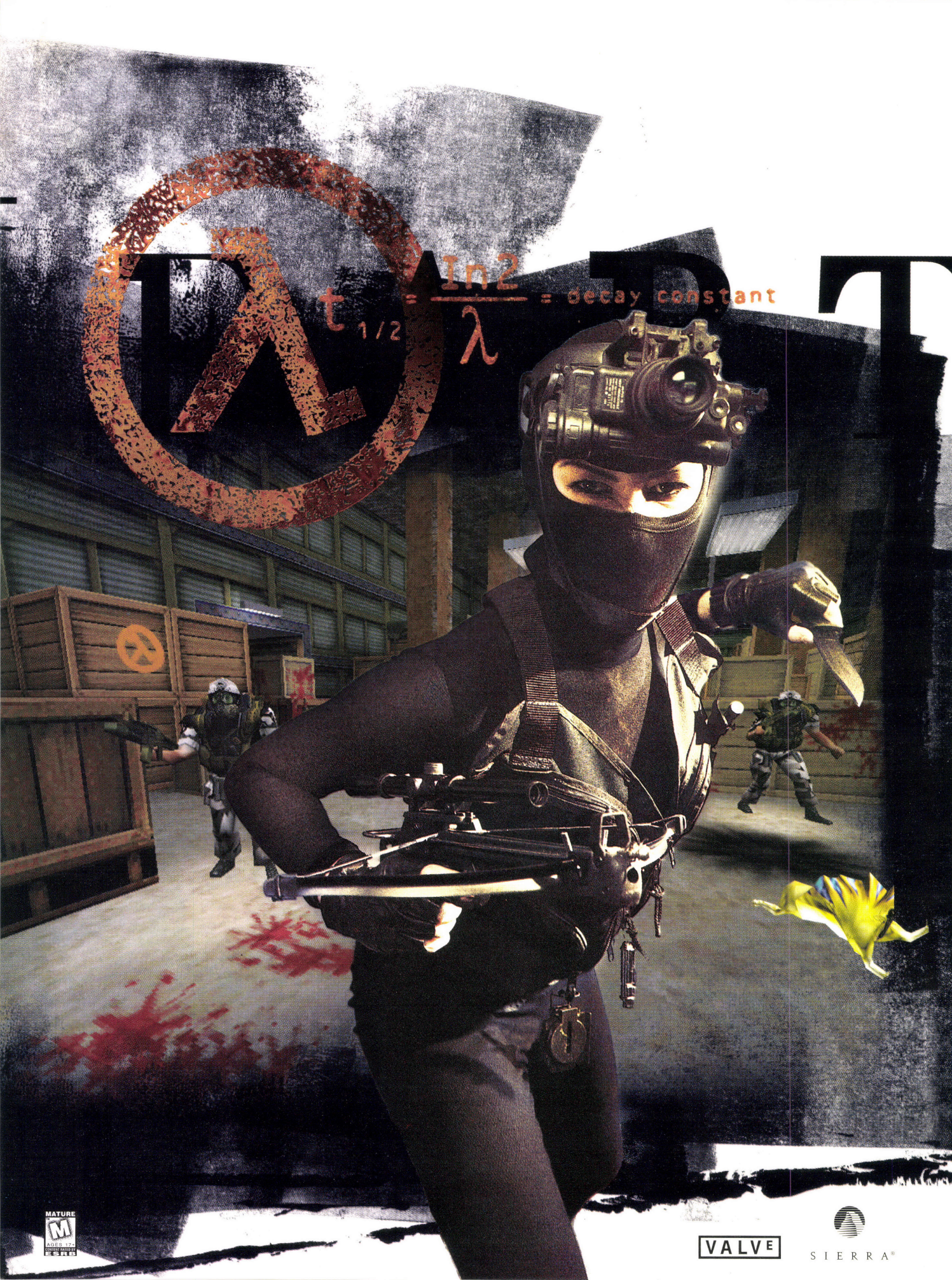
The Player welcomes your comments at ThePlayer@pcgames.com.

ILLUSTRATION BY KATRIN AUCH



"IT MAY VERY WELL REDEFINE THE STANDARD FOR ACTION GAMES."

Steve Klett
Editor-in Chief
PC Games Magazine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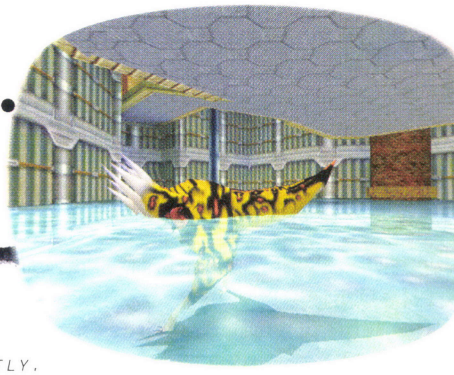

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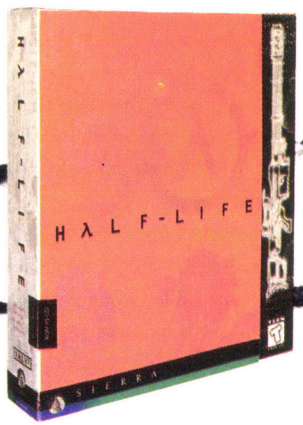
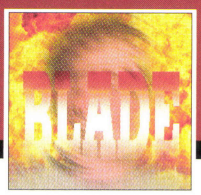


THE OPPONENT



BLADE

If online services want people playing on their sites, they've got to make it affordable.

Pay to Play...er, Okay

Remember The Opponent's opening statement about this online-gaming thing back in December '96? 'Course you do, but just in case: "Pay to Play: No Way" kicked off his spiel as TEN, Mplayer, and Engage all went live.

A year has passed, and they're all still with us (Engage is still with us—remember them?), but with different business models. TEN has stuck to its paid-up subscription guns, developed its interface considerably, and provides a comfortable, accessible place to play—if you have the cash. Mplayer went the other route, making most of its play free and deciding to fight for a greater slice of the ad dollars by showing greater numbers. Happily, it's still here too. But these services still haven't broken through yet—The Opponent still gets the sense that they're fighting for every scrap they can get.

TEN hasn't undertaken any major exclusive signings à la the 3D Realms deal; Mplayer's trying to get every conceivable online game, but there seems to be a logjam in the "coming soon" list. And, of course, Microsoft's (boo, hiss) free Zone is going to enjoy major traffic with Jedi Knight's release and its exclusive deal with LucasArts.

Now there's HEAT. SegaSoft's game network is launching with an aggressive campaign and big ideas on how to make it pay. At launch, the Perimeter option will let you play any IPX-compatible game for free—that's good. The Premium option ($5.95/month or $49.95/year) will give you access to the tournaments, ladders, and other "community" elements—that's okay. Each SegaSoft HEAT–compatible game will come with a minimum of three months' free access—that's good. And there's the retail box with shareware games, a six-month subscription, and T-shirt (whoopee!), all for $29.95—now *that's* excellent. However, none of these offers a significant alternative to the current options.

There is, however, an intriguing option that may just fall flat on its face. SegaSoft's 10Six online game (due for full release in April), Vigilance (a spy/action game to be released in March), and Skies (not due for another year) all use the Transactor technology. Anyone who knows about collectible card games (CCGs) like Magic: The Gathering already understands the concept: You can play the game out of the box, but to make a real difference, to be a *player*, you need to get add-ons. For 10Six et al., these add-ons come in the form of LEDOs, the limited-number items you can buy in booster packs and take into the game.

So what's the problem? CCGs have made millions; why won't it work here? Simple—because there's no tangible proof that you have that item. By their very nature, LEDOs are virtual. Virtual trading of them is a possibility, as each item is randomly created with each boxed version of the game and traded, bought, and sold over the Web. But people don't buy cards just for the game: It's for the sake of having them, for the artwork, for the kudos. The Opponent would want to see something for his booster-pack investment, and a new icon on the screen just wouldn't cut it. He wants *things*.

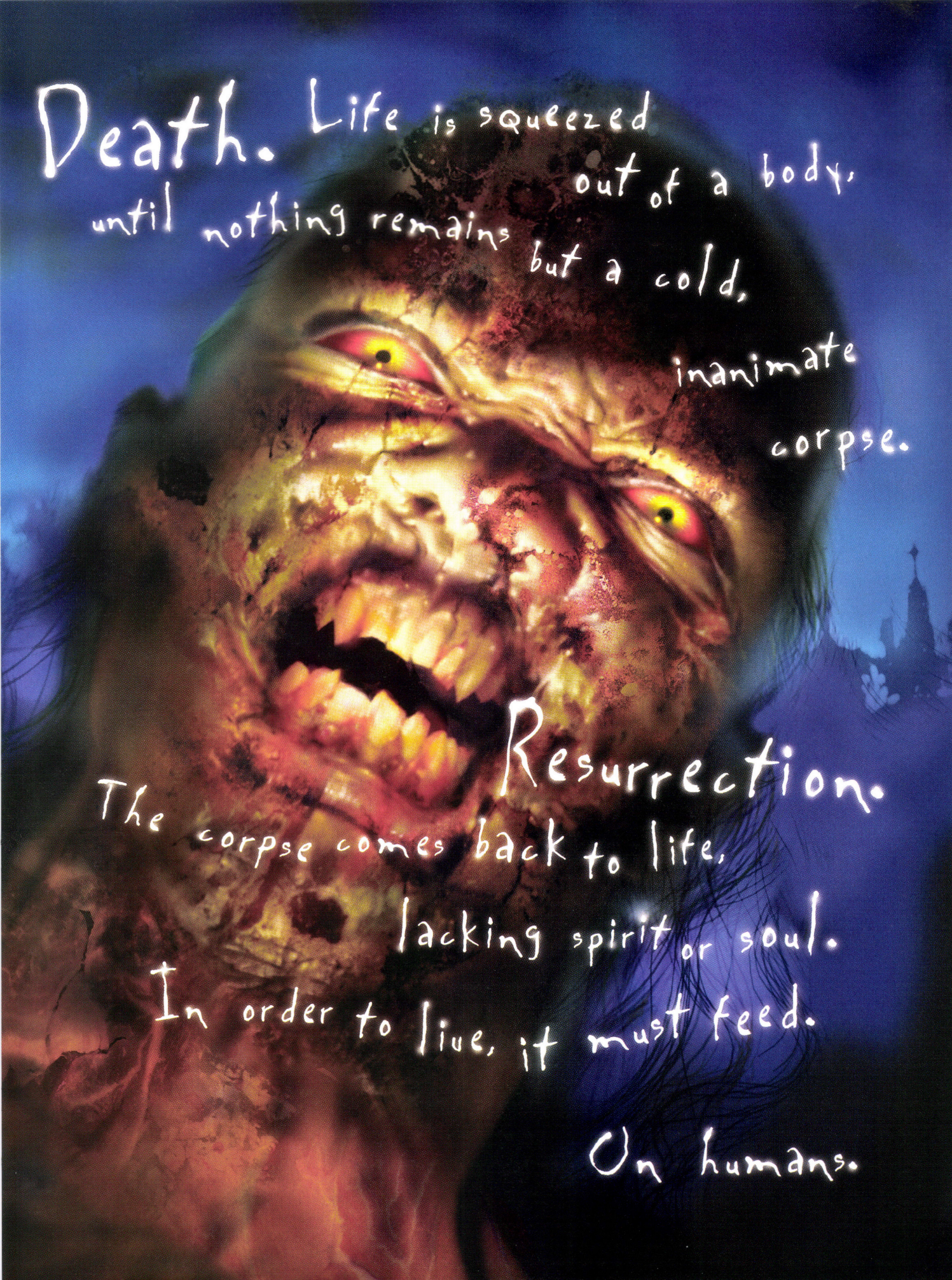
In other online-gaming news, Ultima Online has shipped, finally. This is one that The Opponent has been eagerly awaiting. So is everything hunky-dory in the land of Britannia? Oh no. There's the cost issue.

Charter members get 90 days free for their $90 investment (plus a lovely cloth map—I needed a new dish towel), and then? It's $9.95 a month. Standard retail buyers get 30 days for their $59.95 investment—then it's $9.95 a month. My take? They've got to be kidding! If I buy a game for $60 I may complete it in a month, but then it's likely to have an online multiplay option, so longevity's assured. What if I pay $60 for UO and can't spend masses of hours playing in that first month? Then I have to pay extra—just to see what the game is like! The standard retail should've offered three months minimum, the Charter edition six months. Better yet, how 'bout 30/60 free hours of play?

Origin is claiming a 50 percent access rate for people heading online from the number of units sold. What a surprise! The Opponent would like to see the figures when this opening month is over. This isn't to bag on the game itself—it promises so much—just the pricing. The Opponent doesn't consider $9.95 a month to be "a nominal amount," as Origin claimed in the build-up to the release announcement.

The Opponent says this: If you want to build an online-gaming community of excited, involved people, you've got to let them be able to afford it.

The Opponent gets most of these online services for free; he's just looking out for your consumer interests (nice guy, huh?). Send messages of support (and grief, if you're a company who's charging) to blade@pcgames.com.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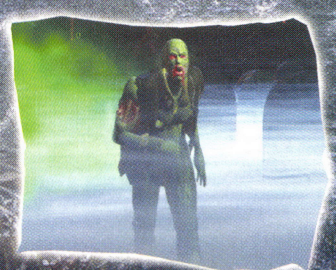

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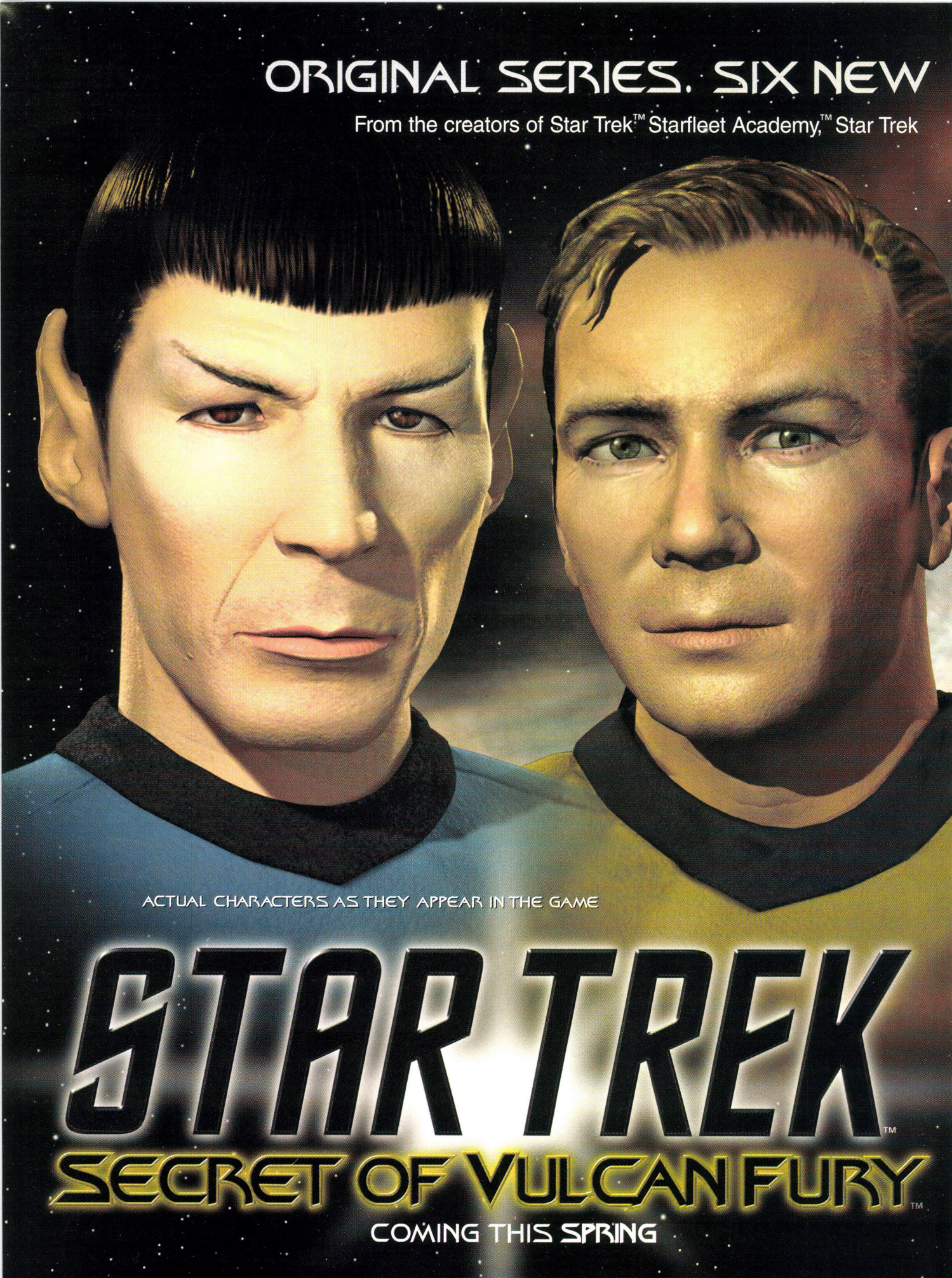
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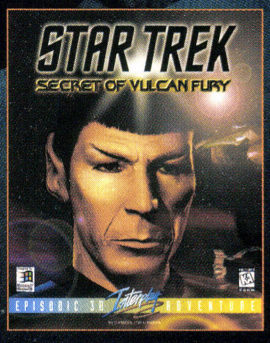

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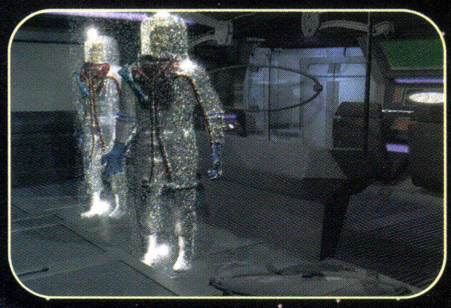

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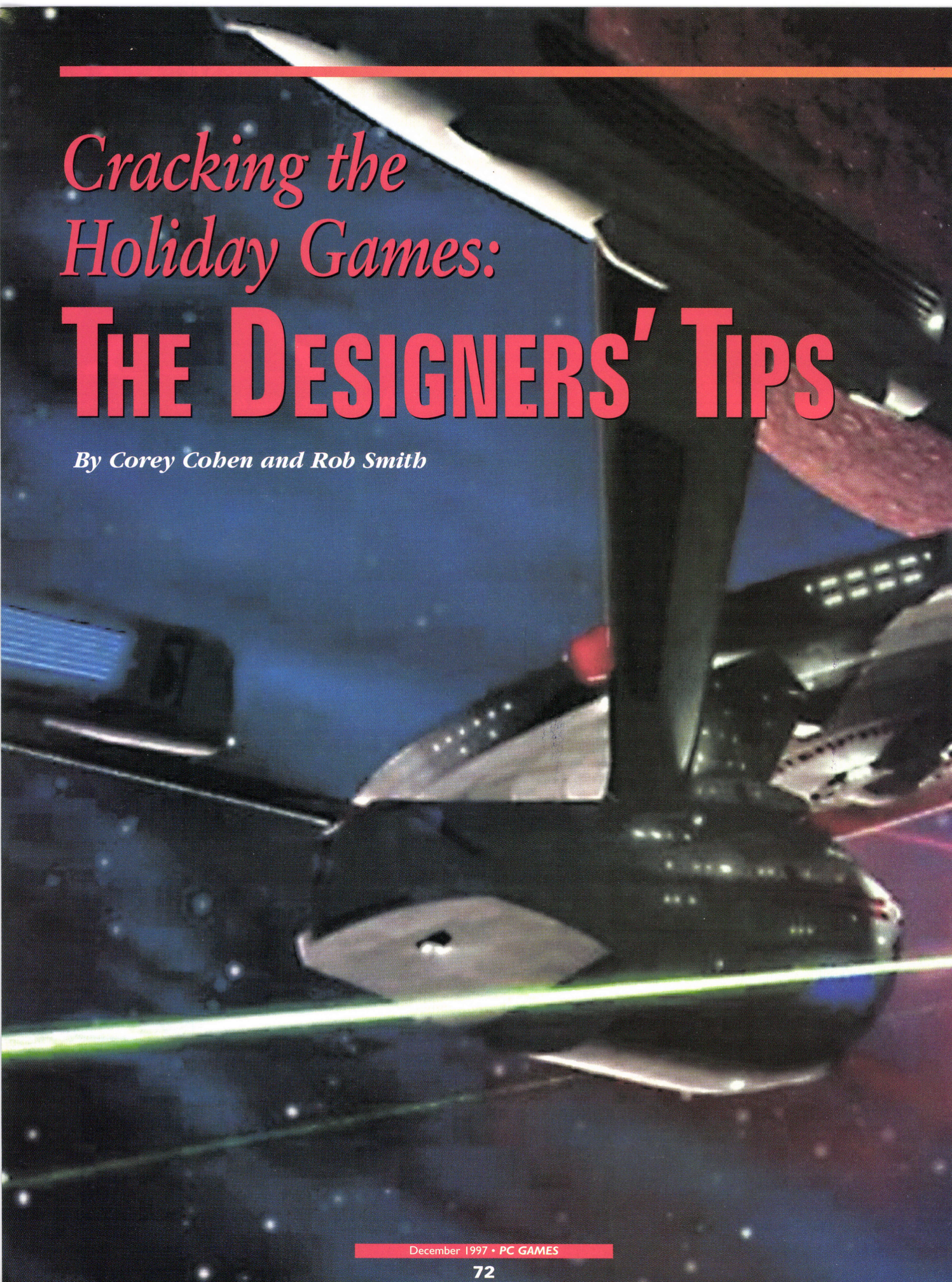


Cracking the Holiday Games: THE DESIGNERS' TIPS

By Corey Cohen and Rob Smith

It's the holidays—the best time of the year for games. It's also when we've got some time to sit down and play *them—and, unless we're game gods, get inevitably stuck without a clue. No problem! We've gone straight to the source—the designers, programmers, and producers of some of the season's hottest games—to get you tips, hints, and secrets galore. And we bring you the full scoop on one of this year's most anticipated games, Jedi Knight.*

Starfleet Academy

It's the place where James T. Kirk and Jean-Luc Picard got their start—the hallowed halls where cadets come and go, and only the best prevail. It's not easy, but luckily for you, you've got a good instructor. We've recruited Rusty Buchert, the producer of Starfleet Academy, to give you some tips that'll send you straight to the captain's chair. Maximum warp!

STARSHIP BASICS

Become really familiar with energy management: remember, power can be taken from your phasers, shields, tractor beam, and other modules for allocation to other things. Know when and where to reallocate your energy. Think carefully about your mission objectives in this way. For example, if you won't need repair crews or your tractor beam on an upcoming mission, divert energy from them to something else.

On starbase, allocate repair crews before you enter a mission, so you don't have a last-minute scramble to allocate repairs to shields, warp drive, or whatever else is damaged.

Photon torpedoes: Don't use them excessively, and don't use them on faraway targets. Save them for when you've taken out an enemy's shields, or when you're up close and want to punch through his shields. Also, scoring a near miss can be better than landing a direct hit; the blast radius will cause damage across much of an enemy ship, rather than just a localized area.

When you're turning to avoid a shot, consider this: Which area do you want exposed to the blast? For example, in a Constitution class vessel, don't duck a shot by turning your nose down—you'll expose both nacelles. In the *Miranda*, don't expose the photon launcher (stuck up on top) and phaser banks (out on the edge).

When firing on a Romulan or Klingon ship, the cloaking device should be your primary target. If you damage it, you'll also score collateral damage in its engineering section and/or other locations.

If you train the tractor beam on a ship too long, it'll take advantage of you and open fire.

And, by all means, says Rusty, play with a joystick. You'll go nuts on a keyboard.

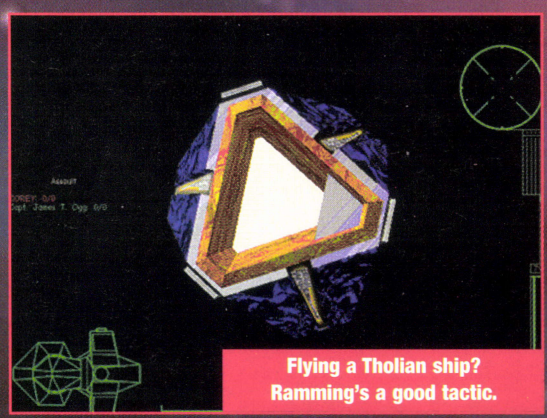
MULTIPLAYER ENGAGEMENTS

General multiplay

Get creative with using your tractor beam as an offensive weapon: try using it to slingshot objects into other ships. Take out a ship's impulse engine, grab the ship with your tractor beam, then fling it into another ship. Collision!

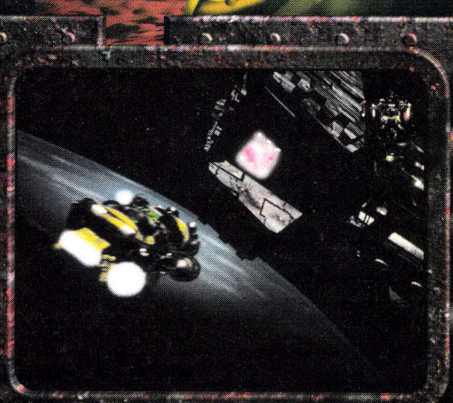
Take advantage of a vessel's strengths. With a Bird of Prey, for example, cloaking and then coming up on somebody's six, while obvious, can be very effective.

The Tholian ships have a high turning radius. They don't have much firepower, but they're tough. Ramming is an option with both Tholian ships because of their armor's toughness and the amount of damage they can take.



Flying a Tholian ship? Ramming's a good tactic.

3 of the most powerful forces in the



universe are about to collide...

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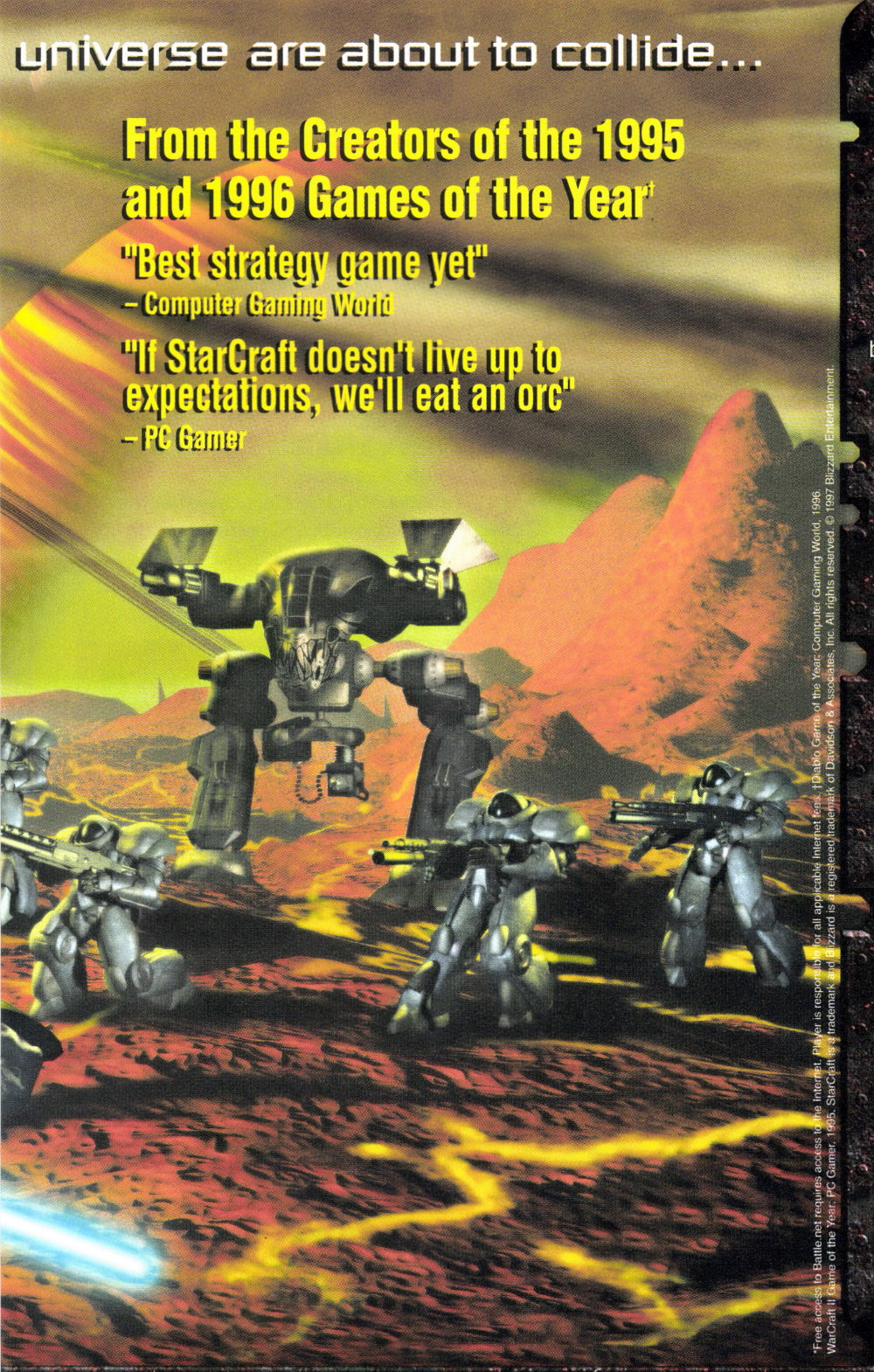

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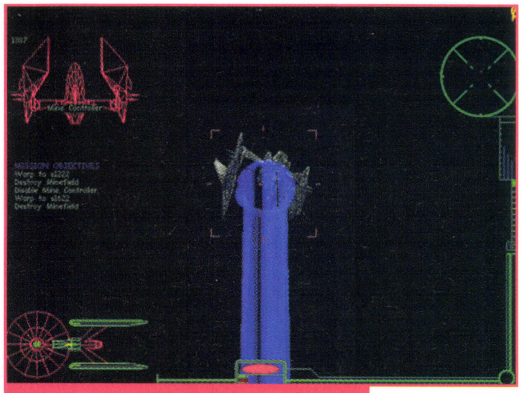


Practice using the tractor beam in solo play—in multiplay, it rocks.

Rusty's favorite craft is the Gorn Light Cruiser, because it has tracking torpedoes. He likes to take out Klingon Advanced Cruisers and Romulan Heavy Cruisers by targeting specific systems (preferably engineering and warp drive, so the vessels can't repair and power up, respectively) from far away (6,000 to 7,000 units). To help him do this, he'll divert power from other weapons to the photons.

Galactic War

Different mindsets: Federation ships outgun Klingon ships, but Klingon captains can take advantage of cloaking. According to Rusty, many of the Starfleet Academy team choose Klingons in multiplay, because fighting with these ships emphasizes stealth and guile as opposed to the Federation ships, which play toe-to-toe. The Klingon Bird of Prey is quicker and carries lots of troops—fellow team members can cruise around fighting in Birds of Prey while the Advanced Cruiser successfully guards a planet. Also, you can hang out by a planet while cloaked in a Bird of Prey and jam other ships from using their transporters.

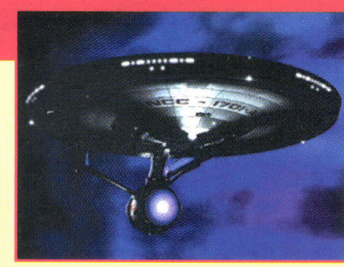
Net Profit

Some people take the straightforward approach, trying to get as much cash as possible, while others play with the constant smaller goal of making improvements to their ship. Rusty tries to continually increase the efficiency of his vessel's impulse engines so he can get from one place to another more quickly than his opponents.

Use Tribbles! If it doesn't conflict with your contract, you can beam Tribbles into an enemy's hold, where they act like a virus. The only way the other guy can get rid of them is to get Mudd's Tribble Eradicator. Also, if Mongo is sent to kill you, you can use Tribbles to get him off your back: He likes them.

A final bit of Net Profit advice: Take out an insurance policy on your ship, especially if you're going to upgrade it. That way, if it's destroyed, it'll come back with all the upgrades you put into it.

MISSION TIPS



THE BARRIER

At one point, you'll approach a bunch of Venturi medium ships, plus the two white ships. What you need to do is sort out which of the medium Venturi ships carries the real Alshoth, since he's powering them all. A good tactic: scan directly for Alshoth himself. Once you find him and take out the ship carrying him, the other medium and white Venturi ships will shut down. Also, once you've done this, don't just up and leave—scan the base. That *is* your primary objective, after all.

There are also two cheats in this mission:

Starbase System: After the Venturi have been destroyed, fly to within transporter range of the starbase and type ******TIBERIUS** (the four stars represent a captain's rank). Engage your transporter, and your photons will be replenished to 60.

Omega 12-300: After warp completion, type **$PUNISH**. Your photons will now do double damage (quite helpful against the three Venturis).

CRY FROM THE DARK

Don't give in to the Gorn "collectors" (they're actually poachers), and don't freak out when they send the Gorn navy after you. Depending on how you talk to them, you can end up either working with them, or fighting them and getting hurt.

KOBAYASHI MARU

The first thing you have to do is decide whether or not you want to cheat. If you decide to cheat, you'll need to think like Kirk: What can you do to make the No-Win scenarios look like plausible wins? Do you make the Klingons' AI not so good, make their weapons do little damage, or make them fear and respect you? Naturally, the last is the best way to go.

BALANCE OF TERROR

In the Starbase system, there's an Easter egg: While at the starbase, type **KNAT ATTACK**. The starbase will be hidden and removed from the communications list. A wave of four alien fighters will attack the player. Defeat these, and a second wave will attack. Defeat these, and a third wave will ram-attack you. Once the player defeats all the "knats," the starbase will reappear and the mission continues.

END GAME

The two things you need to do are to get Maggie Horn not to blow up the creature (talk her down and you can get her transported off the vessel) and to lure the creature away. The best way to lure it is to tractor the *Raven*. The sun creature will follow the ship's warp nacelles as you tow it away. Eventually, you'll reach a distance at which the creature will lose interest and leave the system (you'll know it when the objective turns green).

Cheat: In the Thaxius system, after you warp to the sun, type **MERCURY**. This will cause the Romulan heavy cruiser to blow up.

SMUGGLERS' DEN

Cheat: In the Lambda system, after the Romulan appears, type **$->ME!**. This will cause the Romulan cruiser to self-destruct.

Easter egg: At Theta Draconis, after the trap has been sprung, type $ASTEROID. The Venturi will become docile, and the asteroids will warp out of the system.

COMMON GROUND

Some interesting things to watch for: In the Tasocles system, when you arrive at Thaxius, five sun creatures will appear approximately 50,000 units away and approach you. If any damage is taken by any sun creature, all five will attack. If you scan the sun creatures, the pet names given to them by researchers will appear. Also, in the Hashapur system, a sun creature will do a flyby after four minutes. After eight minutes, a Romulan cruiser will show up to fight you.

Hexen II

Boss-riders got you beat? Trying to figure out all those different characters? We got programmer Mike Gummelt to spill the mystic secrets behind winning at Hexen II—and staying Sheep-free. (Phew!) Behold: the Spell of Victory...

The Disc of Repulsion is a good weapon for fighting the bosses.

CHARACTERS

Crusader

Single-play: When powered up, the Crusader's weapons are very, very good. Using the Tome of Power with the War Hammer, for example, gives it a devastating ranged attack.

When powered up, the Crusader's Ice Mace and Meteor Staff are excellent for taking out multiple enemies. The Ice Mace is ideal for flesh monsters; it's less effective against creatures like the Golem.

Multiplay: In general, the Crusader is very good at deathmatch. His Meteor Staff is basically the rocket launcher of the game, and it's good for quick kills and rocket-type jumping.

His glyph isn't as exciting as those of the other players, but you can drop it in the path of other players when you're running away.

The Ice Storm will disorient players with its flash; use this to set 'em up for the quick take-down.

The powered-up Light Bringer is nasty in corridors—take advantage of its reflective beams to work your opponent in small areas.

Don't underestimate the Paladin: his glyph can kick your butt.

Assassin

Strengths: Use her ability to hide in shadows when you're hurt, so that you can heal. Another tactic is to lay a good trap by hiding 'til opponents run up to you. Trip glyphs are excellent traps—run away, then shoot one down in front of you. Your pursuer will trip on it. Her Staff of Set is really good—when it's powered up, you can take out multiple opponents. At higher levels, she can backstab, a good tactic that'll allow you to progress in skill level quickly.

Weaknesses: Her Grenades are a bit hard to aim for beginners, especially in the heated frenzy of a deathmatch. Also, her few hit points means she can be killed more easily than other characters—a problem in multiplay.

Necromancer

Strengths: His Magic Missiles are OK, but they block your view a bit, so it's hard to chase someone down with them. In a deathmatch, it's better to use them when they're powered up.

Use his Bone Shards for good close-range kills. They're more powerful than the Crusader's meteor staff when powered-up and are great for long-range kills. Use the powered-up Raven Staff as an all-around deadly weapon—it shoots out a flock of Ravens that would make Sir Alfred proud.

One of the coolest things about the Necromancer is his glyph: if it's set up in a corner and spots an enemy, it'll move toward him—helping you keep an eye on him.

Weaknesses: His Sickle's not so hot.

Paladin

Strengths: Good all-around character. His Vorpal Sword can easily decapitate someone. His Axe is good in corridors; his Purifier is a strong weapon overall. The Paladin's glyph is powerful—throw one down while running, and it'll burn a pursuer to a crisp. His Divine Intervention Tornado is also a big strength in deathmatches.

Weaknesses: The limited range of his weapons, particularly his Gauntlets and Vorpal Sword.

WISDOM OF THE AGES

When someone turns you into a Sheep, use the Tome of Power or the Glyphs (in order of preference). If you lack those, use Invisibility or a Haste or Teleport coin to run away until the spell wears off. Also, make sure you boost your health ASAP, since Sheep have lower health. But if you kill someone while you're a Sheep, you'll get extra points.

Practice your timing with the Disc of Repulsion—it's good for reflecting things that track, like the Beetle or Purifier. It's also good for getting out of Scarab Chains or the Meteor Tornado. The Disc is excellent for reflecting most bosses' powerful shots, too.

CREATURE-KILLING

Were-jaguars: Back off and try distance attacks; you don't want to get involved in up-close melee fighting. Use powered-up weapons against them. Avoid them when they're in packs, or they'll surround you and tear you apart. For a laugh, use the Disc of Repulsion to push them into lava.

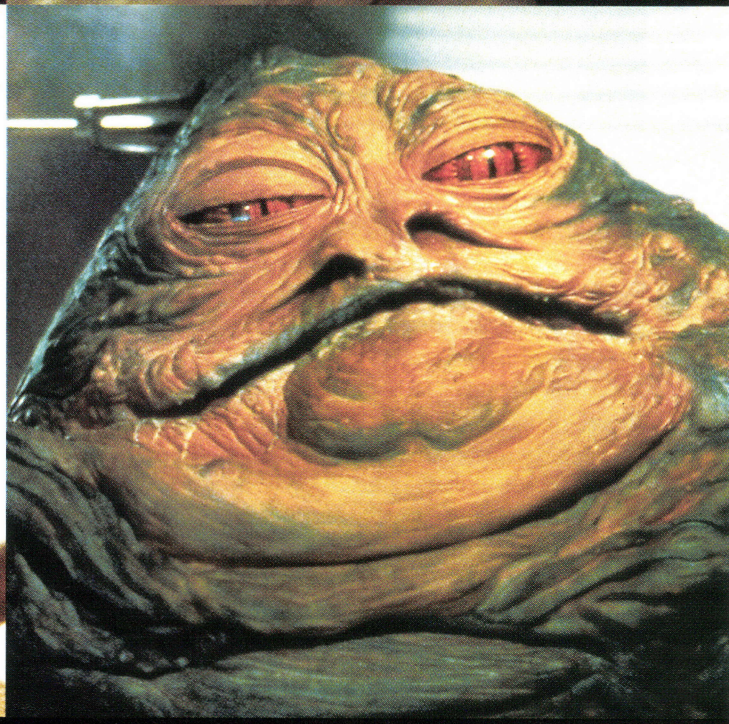
Golems: Keep your distance. Pound on 'em until they succumb.

Imps: Very maneuverable. Take advantage of their low health, get a few good hits, and they're history.

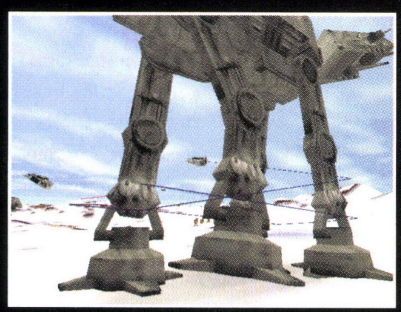
Death: Take to the air and use the Ring of Flight—you'll have more maneuverability and won't have to worry about dodging ground obstacles. Not to mention that it makes for a cool fight.

HEXEN II CHEATS

god:	Godmode ON/OFF
noclip:	Toggles clipping on/off
notarget:	Enemies don't recognize you
changelevel x:	Changes level (x = level name)
restart:	Restarts the level
name x:	Changes your name (x = new name)
give h x:	Gives health (x = amount of health. Maximum 999)
impulse 9:	All Weapons/Mana
impulse 10:	Change Weapon
impulse 14:	Makes you a Sheep
impulse 23:	Torch
impulse 43:	All Weapons/Mana/Items
impulse 44:	Throws an Item
impulse 100:	Uses the Torch
impulse 101:	Uses the Quartz Flask
impulse 102:	Uses the Mystic Urn
impulse 103:	Uses the Krater
impulse 104:	Uses the Chaos Device
impulse 105:	Uses the Tome of Power
impulse 106:	Uses the Summon Spell
impulse 107:	Uses the Invisibility
impulse 108:	Uses the Glyph
impulse 109:	Uses the Boots
impulse 110:	Uses the Repulsion
impulse 111:	Uses the Bo Peep
impulse 112:	Uses the Ring of Flight
impulse 113:	Uses the Force Cube
impulse 114:	Uses the Icon Defense
chase_active 1:	Chase Mode (camera)

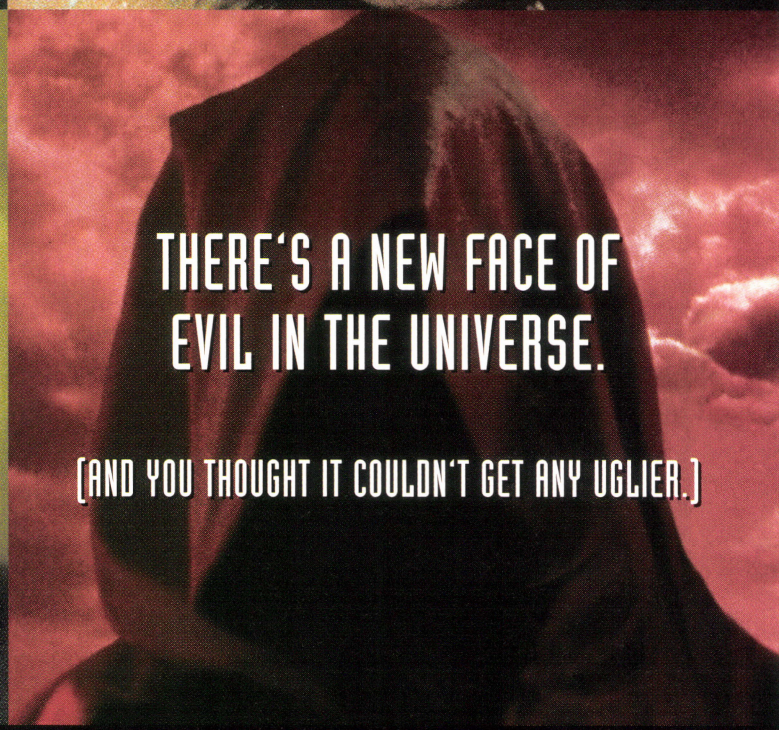


YOU'RE DASH RENDAR - QUICK ON THE TRIGGER OF A BLASTER.



IT'S YOU AND YOUR TINY SNOWSPEEDER VERSUS A GIANT, IMPERIAL AT-AT.

SPEEDER BIKE MODE - FAST-PACED ACTION WITH A KICK START.



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TEEN AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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Postal

All right, sicko—admit it: You love Postal, but you're too embarrassed to ask for help. No problem: We've anticipated your fiendish needs. These hyperviolent tips come straight from Steve Wik, Postal's level designer. Do what you will.

Move Like a Maniac

Steve's single best tip? Use the mouse! He sets his so that the vertical sensitivity is absolute 0 and the horizontal is 0.6, then sets the right button to forward/run and the left one to backward/run. You can run circles around the game this way.

Also, use cover and try to fight each guy as he appears. If you try to just run out into the open and shoot, you will DIE.

Don't let enemies chase you into uncleared areas. Try to pick and choose your battles, and whenever possible, draw your enemy into an area you've already cleared so that you don't get surrounded.

Grenades, Molotovs, the shotgun—they're your tools for surviving the bridge of death.

Ultimate Destruction

The machine-gun is your best friend. Not only is it good for long-distance sniping, but you can run and shoot at the same time. Learn to shoot while running backward.

Remember, you can duck under missiles.

Enemies are really good at setting you (and each other) on fire, so watch out. If you do find yourself on fire, use it to your advantage: run into enemies and set them aflame.

Try to lure enemies away from trees and out from behind buildings. When hidden behind objects, they have the advantage and will snipe at you. Molotov cocktails are great for flushing them out.

If you find it annoying that you can see yourself behind some objects and not others, hit F3. This toggles the X-ray effect, making all objects transparent.

Multiplayer Massacres

Many of the techniques listed above apply in multiplay, especially playing with the mouse.

Putting mines behind stuff is a particularly evil strategy. One strategy Steve's seen is to drop a mine under yourself and commit suicide before it arms, leaving a tempting pile of weapons/ammo with a mine hidden under it.

The great thing about the isometric view and the size of the player characters is that they let you set up meaningful ambushes. Take advantage of this.

Psycho Secrets

In single-play, on the top-down bridge level, go into the backyard of the house directly below where you start. You'll see some power-ups at the bottom of the screen. If you walk through one of the trees that overlap the yard's wall, you'll find that you can walk right through the wall and easily get to the powerups.

In the mine, if you walk directly to the right, you'll eventually find a wall that looks solid. Walk into the lighted area, and you'll find a secret opening that gives you an alternate route.

Not really secrets, but cool: If you walk up to pay phones, you may hear something interesting. Also, after clearing out the construction-site level, stand in front of the port-a-potty trademark? for more jolly audio fun!

Rough Spots

In the mine, use the wall secret above to sneak up on the assault-cannon guy at the top of the bend. Bank a grenade around the curve (or use a Molotov) to take him out. This is much easier than coming at him from the other direction.

Been wondering how to get to the huge industrial complex that's accessed via a long, narrow, obstacle-filled bridge? First, take out the two gunners guarding the bridge entrance. Bank a grenade off the first car so that it blows up the guys hiding behind the first bunch of crates. Run to where they were and lob a Molotov into the next group, being careful not to get any on you. Back off until the flames die out, then charge in and fire a missile or two (or a Molotov) into the group behind the barricades. Use the shotgun to nail anyone who somehow survived the fire, and watch out for the missile-launcher guy hiding in the parking lot. Steve thinks one of the demos in the final release shows him making a pretty good attempt at the bridge...

Take No Prisoners

With its unique perspective and intricate levels, TNP offers a wealth of challenge—and some whoop-ass multiplay. Here are some tips that'll leave you last man standing, courtesy of associate producer Mark Boccuzzi, lead designer Michael Raymond-Judy, and producer Steve Schreck.

Broad Tactics

Don't ignore the information you get in your Personal Data Device. TNP is primarily an action game, but you do get a lot of helpful info here.

Remember, every item and weapon has a purpose, so make sure you use your gear selectively. The hoverbelt, for example, shouldn't be used up right away, or you'll struggle to get to places to recharge it. The Gauss gun is particularly useful against mechanical creatures, like robots and mechanical men. Mutant creatures, such as zombies and rats, are particularly vulnerable to fire. When fighting the growlers (in the Downtown Level), use the saber, not the shotgun or assault rifle; otherwise, you're wasting ammo. If you want to run past something like an ambush, or enhance the damage you do with the energy saber, use the muscle enhancer.

Get your enemies to fight each other. Because they're divided up into zones, they may hate each other more than they hate you. The growlers and jaws, for example, may even ignore you firing at them if you can get them to engage each other.

In TNP, height is key. Hold the high ground, and you can snipe and see all around you.

One of the unique things about TNP is its nonlinear levels. You may need to revisit levels more than once, and some paths through the game are easier than others. Don't assume that just because you have physical access to a place that you should be there right then. If you walk into a level and you're getting your butt kicked (e.g., facing rats without the flamethrower), you should probably go back and get something you need. Along these lines, you'll want to access Waste Treatment #4 and the Subway level ASAP, because they give you access to other areas. Also, the Munitions Depot is a good place to go to rearm yourself.

You can push a lot of the objects and enemies around—it's often fun to push enemies off high places and into hazards like molten metal. In Alamo, there's a collapsing roof: steer enemies under it, run out of the way, and they'll get crushed. Use the environment against your enemies. Keep in mind, though, that if you do something like push enemies into electricity, you won't be able to get their weapons and health.

Because TNP's top-down perspective lets you see where you're sidestepping, there's no substitute for good strafing. Because you can see around corners, you can strafe into and out of danger, firing and withdrawing. You see projectiles coming at you more than in first-person games, so take advantage of it by strafing out of the way. While weapons like the rocket launcher and laser rifle are very powerful, you can defeat someone using the chaingun if you strafe well.

Make frequent use of both camera views (the tilt and the strict top-down)—they let you see different things. Also, use the Look Up function to peek ahead. It shows you just a little more of what's in front of you—and possibly shooting at you.

The energy shield protects you well against most things, but the zombies' grenade-launcher can penetrate it.

Again, if you get into sewers, you'll need a heat-based weapon.

Player vs. Player

If you're playing cooperative mode, decide in advance who's doing what. (Some might be cannon-fodder, others might shoot.) Take advantage of being able to see everything/everyone on the screen, even if you're facing opposite directions—take a bullet for your buddy, if you need to.

Holding the high ground is always better than having the better weapon: If you're on top, you see everything around you and underneath you, and you can drop stuff on people's heads. Sniping works very well in this game.

Dropping lots of claymores around the bases is a good thing.

Don't forget that you can drop weapons. For example, in Capture the Flag, if your buddy has the flag, you can toss him the Gauss gun to help him out.

When you're being chased in a deathmatch, run through a transporter, then drop a portable force-barrier to crush any enemies that follow.

If you're on a catwalk, you can use a rocket net to trap someone, then push 'em off, leaving 'em suspended in the net. Help-lessssss!

The stealth device works wonders, unless somebody has infra-red goggles. (Every weapon in the game has a counter.)

Mission Tips

Don't shoot the security forces in the first level (you'll know not to if you check your PDD)! Stay allies with them. They'll leave you alone if you don't attack them, but if you do, all hell breaks loose. Only fight them if you want a big challenge.

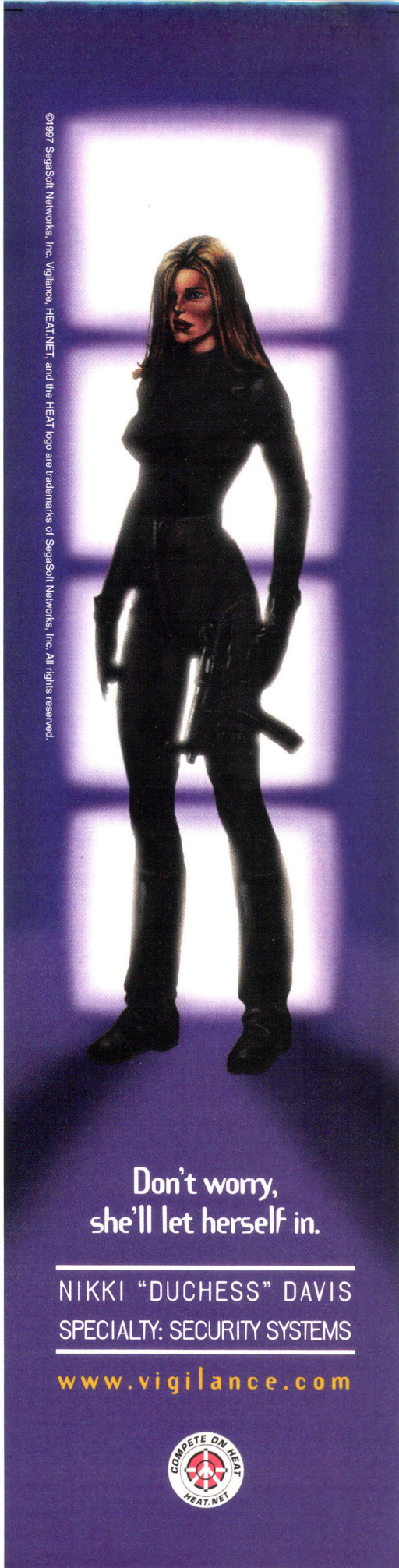
In the Proving Grounds, there's one room with rotating blades you need to crawl under. It pays to stop and think.

On the Campus, if you go down into the classrooms and blow up all the furniture, you'll get a bunch of frag grenades.

In the Mission Control Center, some of the data terminals have info on the game's creators.

AND THAT'S NOT ALL!

Liked this month's developer secrets? Then you'll love the sequel. Next month, our holiday-games tips continue with hints, cheats, and strategies galore for Dark Reign, NHL 98, Warbirds 2.0, and more of the season's top games. Don't miss it!



JEDI KNIGHT—MASTER THE FORCE

Light or Dark, there are many pathways in the world of Jedi Knight—and many weapons and powers to control. We don't have Yoda on staff (at least that we know of), but we did get the exclusive guide to playing Jedi from the guardians at LucasArts.

Epic. An overused word in the games industry, but one that is perfectly applicable to Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II. For those who have already battled through, one thing will have become apparent—it ain't easy. But with a little guidance from the experts at LucasArts, a few pointers from the gang at PC Games, *and a suitable helping of sheer bloody-mindedness, the road to Jedi status can be made quite a bit easier. We're here to serve...*

BEATING JEREC IS EASY

A few simple things you should always be aware of:

1. Use the Bryar pistol on exploding crates; it uses less ammo, and ammo conservation is vital.
2. On the Hard difficulty level, the machinery speeds up, so in addition to facing more enemies, you have to be quicker at moving.
3. Those Thermal-lobbing Grans can drop a detonator as they get wasted. It offers three options: It's a dud, it's there for you to grab, or it's going to explode. If you see the Thermal, look to see if it has slightly sunk into the environment—that's the key sign that alerts you that it's going to go off in 3, 2, 1...

That Thermal can be picked up.

4. Don't always destroy the exploding crates, as you may need them to jump off onto other boxes to access some of the secrets. Look around carefully first. Also, the boxes and crates most likely to yield a power-up are the six-sided ones. Leave the others (unless you're in one of those destructive moods). This is particularly worth remembering on Level 9, the Field Station, where you may need them to access certain secrets.
5. Many elevators have power-ups hidden underneath them. Send them up and look underneath them (but be sure to get out of the way as they descend). It's often useful to send elevators down on their own: they may crush any enemies at the bottom. You can also send down a Sequencer or Thermal to greet any welcoming committee.
6. Light is important—use the Field Light to view darkened corners, because they may hide secret areas. Remember that these environments are 3D—look up and down for enemies and power-ups.
7. Remember that all the enemies can hear. Changing weapons is noisy and can ruin your carefully planned approach if you decide to change mid-sneak. Retreat, change to the right weapon, and then don't let them know what hit them.

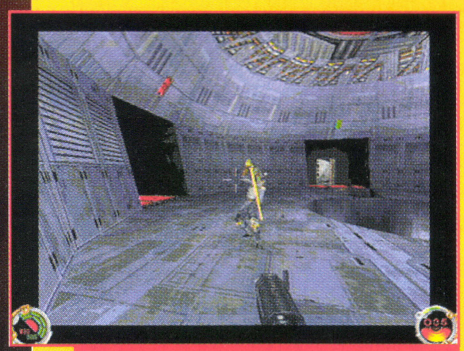
THE WEAPONS OF THE JEDI

Bryar Pistol: Very accurate at long range. As an alternative to the Bowcaster, it proves useful for taking out guards at a distance. Don't underestimate it.

Thermal Detonator: The secondary function gives a 3- to 4-second delay. Fire a few shots with the Bryar

Pistol from a distance (especially when you're above a group of enemies). Their awareness AI alerts them to the noise and they will investigate. Introduce them to the detonator once they're all standing together.

Another potentially useful, and fatal, option is to use the blast of the detonator to jump a little higher (similar to the grenade/rocket-jump in Quake). It takes practice, but use the delay, and be



Not only does it look cool, but the saber is also a great defensive weapon.

most of the way through your jump when the detonator explodes. With a bit of luck, it'll give you the boost you need. Of course, once you have Force Jump, this is redundant.

Bowcaster: Accurate but slow. Use it for stationary targets in the distance, and use the secondary function (reflective shots) to take out enemies you know are hiding around corners.

Imperial Repeater Rifle: The secondary triple-blast shot is very effective against officers.

Rail Detonator: The rocket launcher! If you're retreating, firing the secondary option into a wall or floor could dissuade any pursuers.

Sequencer Charge: Don't lay these things as proximity mines near useful pick-ups. That's the way of the Wuss, not the way of the Jedi—even a Dark one. Okay, so maybe it *is* a good strategy...

Concussion Rifle: Useful at a distance, but be sure to use the less-powerful secondary option if you're attacked at close quarters.

Lightsaber: In third-person, always keep enemies in the middle of your view. The auto-block of energy-weapon blasts works when you're facing them. Charging forward and holding fire produces a swift three-slash attack (hit another direction key at the end of this combo to get an extra swipe in). Combined with circle-strafing, fire while holding strafe to slash where you were—this is useful for getting around an opponent and hitting him in the back. This is especially deadly against the majority of the bosses.

The secondary function is a powerful double-strike, but this leaves you open to attack. Use the swift three-slash attack against a Jedi trying this maneuver, and you'll be likely to get more hits in.

Another defensive use of the saber is to back off from an opponent; this produces an uppercut to either side that can deflect saber blows and leave your opponent open for a counterattack.

KEYBOARD CONFIGURATIONS

Varying playing styles require varying setups. The WASD combo is most useful, as it gives a plentiful supply of keys around these to be bound for quick access to power-ups (you can never get to a Bacta Tank too quickly) and the Force powers. A three-button mouse can solve some problems, as well. With Fire on button one, Jump is a good option for 2, and Secondary Fire for 3.

Set the Force power you use most often to Caps Lock, Crouch to Left Shift, and other Force powers or items (like the lightsaber) to Z, X, and C.

In multiplay, the LucasArts pros have different configs for the various levels and Jedi levels. Simply remember that you can change them to suit the circumstances. (For instance, put Force Jump on Caps Lock on the open levels where jumping is key, and use Force Pull there for item-friendly levels.)

MULTIPLAYER-LEVEL TIPS

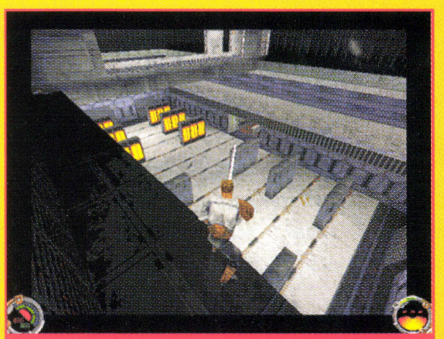
There are secrets on most of the levels. Knowing where they are is always a good idea! Force powers are key and open up various tactical opportunities, such as using Force Jump (or even Speed) to launch yourself above opponents and drop mines on them.

Nar Shaddaa Loading Terminal

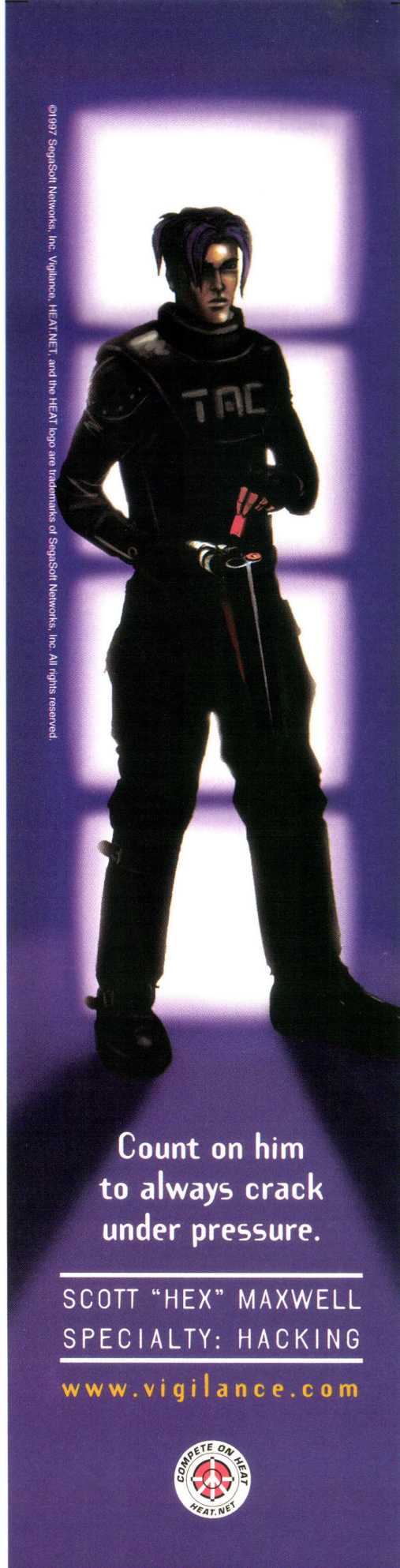
Force Jump and Force Pull are incredibly useful; getting access to the power-ups is key (and remember the medical droid for that health boost).

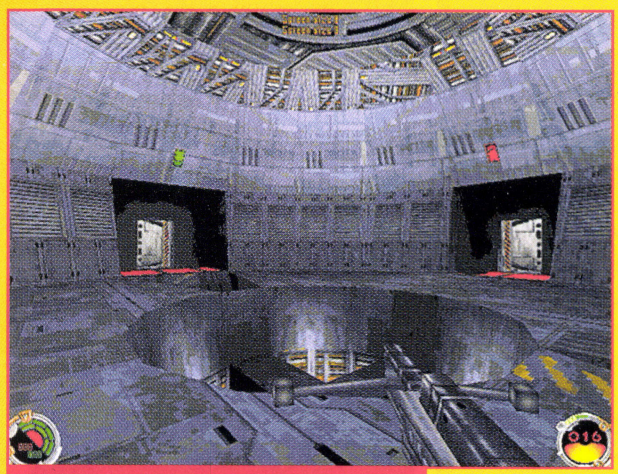
Bespin Mining Station

This revolves around pitched battles in the central, circular arena. Go up to the elevator to collect the Bacta tanks (notice the weapons high up in the



Fast access to these ledges with Force Jump will give you an advantage.





Don't leave sequencers at the bottom of this shaft—it's lame.

shaft). The narrow confines and open ledges can make Force Blinding a useful ally.

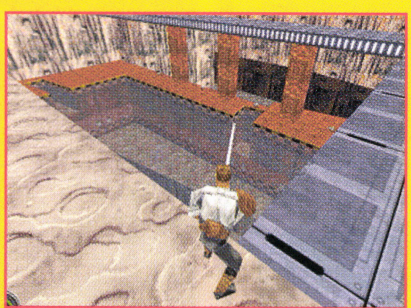
Blades of Death

Force Pull is useful to get the Force power-ups, but they can also be reached with a careful jump off the edge.

One secret is only accessible using the Force Jump. Opposite the cubbyhole in the wall is a lit archway. Just to the side of it is a non-solid wall. Jump through it for power-ups. There's also another one of these on the level—shoot the walls to see whether they're solid or not.

Canyon Oasis

Force Speed and Force Jump give you full access to this open level. Remember, when falling from a height, try to hit the water—you don't die. Use the strafe keys to line up if your descent is a little off. There are a couple of potential sniper ledges, but Concussion Rifles should remove the snipers pronto.



Force Speed and Force Pull are useful here.

The Valley of the Jedi Tower

Lightsabers only, so the choice of Force powers is key. There are plenty of objects with which you can use Force Throw. Force Destruction is also effective for causing opponents to fall off the narrow ledges. There's a rim at the top that's reachable with a Force Jump, but it's only useful if you have Destruction to target opponents in the distance. This level tends to be a King of the Hill affair, as players vie for control of the Super Shield (which has a 60-second respawn time). This might be a level where Always Run is more awkward, because the narrow ledges can make control difficult.

Battleground Jedi

Inside the ship's wreckage, there are plenty of objects to be forcibly thrown at opponents. It's also possible to get on top of the ship—if only I knew how.

FORCE POWERS AND COMBOS

Let's face it: The Dark Side Force powers are just too cool to be ignored, but they can be turned against their evil user. The Jedi who masters the Force powers will be extremely tough to beat in multiplay. At Rank 6, powers from Light and Dark are available, but some combos aren't effective. On the Light Side, Persuasion and Blinding perform essentially the same function, but Blinding can be more effective as an offensive attack. Make sure your Force powers complement each other and your style of play.

The Light Side

Force Healing: Well, it can't hurt for a star or two to be used here.

Force Persuasion: Invisibility—look for the small blue sparks that emanate from a "Persuasive" Jedi. When using the lightsaber in third person, you'll be invisible to yourself, so combine it with Force Seeing to solve this—very handy on the lightsaber-only levels.

Force Blinding: Very effective, especially on the levels with high platforms—your opponent will either have to move and risk falling or stand still and be fodder for your weapon of choice.

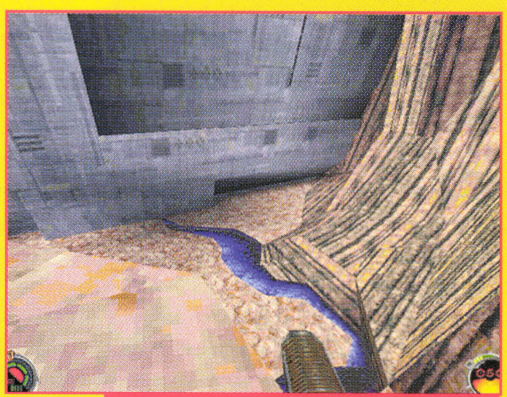
Force Absorb: Hit this whenever a Dark Jedi has you in a Force Grip. You won't take damage, although you won't be able to move—but you'll have your Force Energy recharged. It also protects you from having any of your weapons Force Pulled, and you even get energy back when in the view of a Dark Jedi using Deadly Sight.

Force Protection: As a Rank 8 Jedi, select four stars in all the Light-side–only powers to get a protective mesh that withstands virtually everything (except the lightsaber) at a cost of 200 Force points.

The Neutral Side

Force Speed: Most useful in the open levels, especially when combined with Force Jump—it can enable you to get virtually anywhere on the map in a single (mighty impressive) bound.

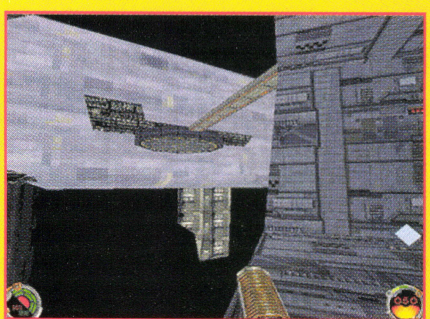
Force Jump: If you select just one star, consider binding your Jump key as Force Jump (it saves a key and allows you to do the Force Jumps more quickly). This is useful on every level.



Defend from this hill to maintain control of the power-ups.

Force Pull: Possibly the most useful of all the Force powers. It won't Pull a lightsaber, but with a quick one-hit key, a cocky opponent is going to lose his weapon. It can also be used to snatch power-ups at a distance (which is going to annoy anyone who's gone to retrieve them the hard way).

Force Seeing: More useful in single-play, where it shows where enemies are hidden on the map view. In multiplay, those with a penchant for running around invisible suddenly aren't quite so effective.



Controlling the Force pick-ups is key, as is snagging the Super Shield.

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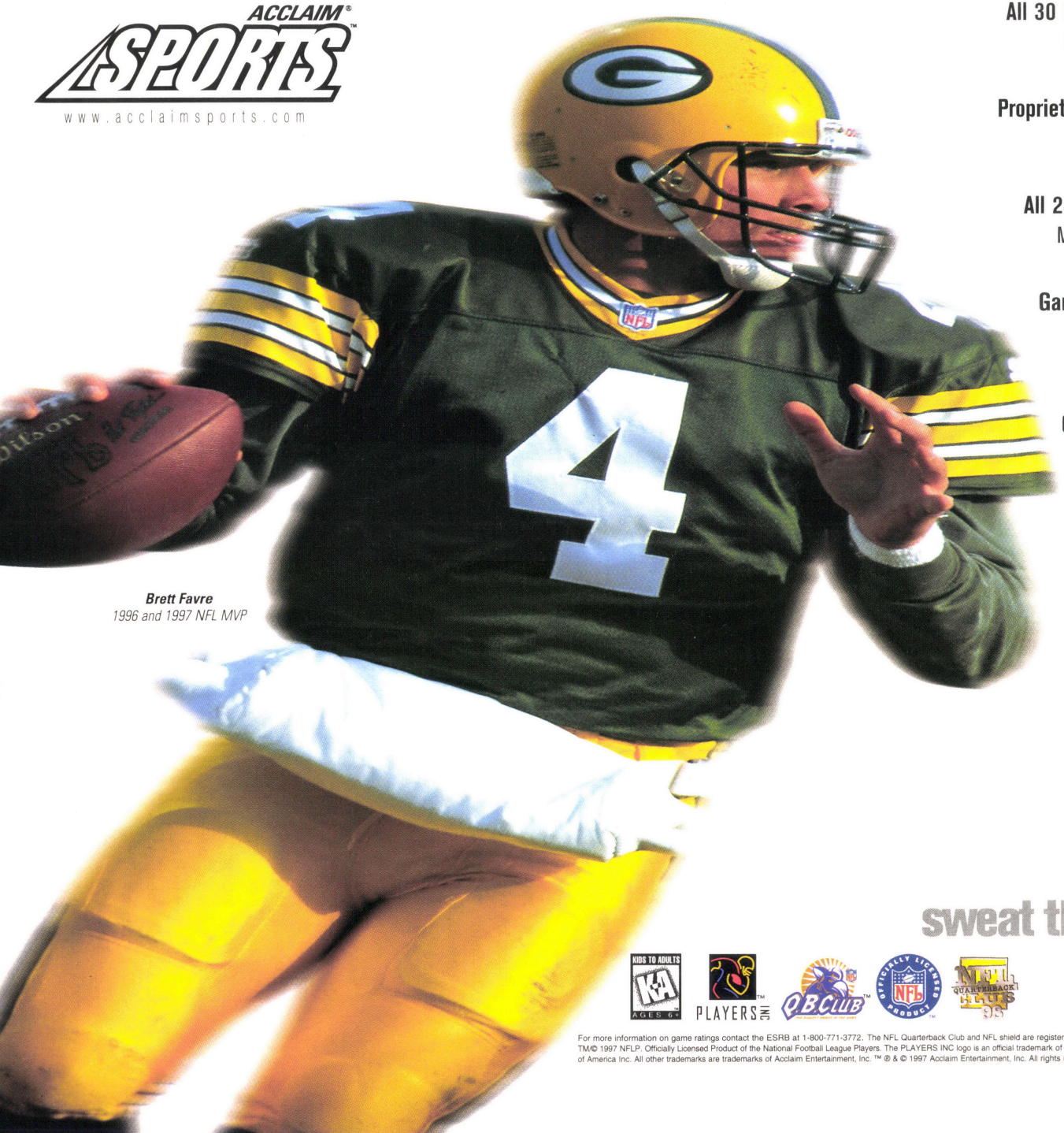

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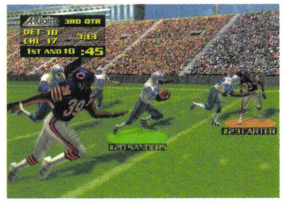

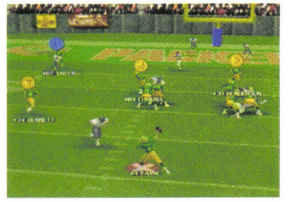

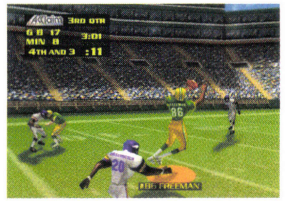

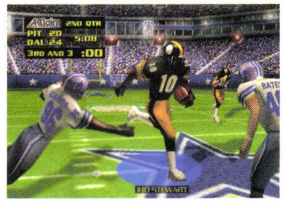

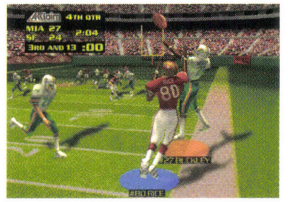

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The Dark Side

Force Throw: It uses a line of sight, so make sure that throwable objects are between you and your target before triggering it. For certain levels only.

Force Grip: Used in conjunction with the lightsaber, this is a deadly combo. Even a Jedi who's Absorbing the damage is still immobile and susceptible to a few swift slashes. To get out of a Force Grip, try jumping like a lunatic. It works as a line-of-sight effect, so you may be able to break it by getting out of that line.

Force Lightning: Make sure you have a clear line of sight to the target. And keep moving to keep the blast on them.

Force Destruction: Useful on open levels with lots of ledges and platforms as a method of getting opponents to tumble off. Can be most effective on lightsaber-only levels as a ranged offensive option.

Force Deadly Sight: As a Rank 8 Dark Jedi, select four stars in all the above to trigger this potent effect. It does significant damage to everyone in line of sight.

BOSS STRATEGIES

All the bosses should be fought primarily with the lightsaber. Get a quick sense of the environment, but don't grab all the power-ups—you'll need them later. Blocking their attacks with the saber is key. They each have a distance at which they'll attack with Force powers or weapons. Judge that distance, nip toward the boss, then back away to keep him switching his attack form. Knowing which Force powers they each use is pretty useful—so here are a few tips:

Pic and Gorc: Pic likes to use Persuasion, and is very quick on his feet; Gorc grips really hard, but is slow. Isolate the two first, which is easily done by leaping between the ledge and main platform. Take out Gorc by circle-strafing him at close range and slashing him in the back. Lure Pic into the side room where the fight started, back him into a corner, and slash away. (Save your Bacta Tanks for your fight with Pic.)

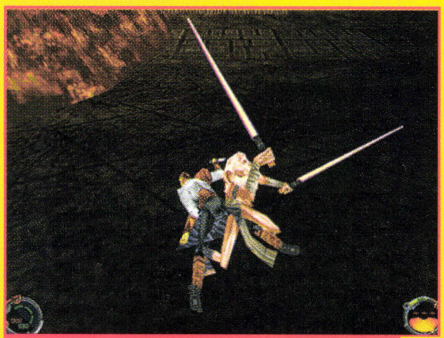
Jerec: Jerec's the last of the Dark Jedi you'll face, and while he's tough, you should be ready for him. His main weapon is Destruction; always be wary of this attack. The key to defeating him is patience. Engage him only at close quarters, and don't bother using Force Powers to attack him directly—use Force Speed and Jump as defensive measures. Run at him and slash him in the back as you step away—jump as soon as you slash to avoid his return attack. If you take damage, use Force Speed to get away and pick up the two Bacta Tanks that respawn. Once he makes a run for the tower to replenish his health, Force Speed to the doorway to cut him off. Crouch in the doorway and slash him until he's dead. If he gets into the tower three times—only twice if you don't hit the buttons behind the statues—he wins.

SECRETS ALL THE WAY

There's absolutely loads of them—far too many to list here, so we'll take you through some of the highlights of the opening levels (and a few later ones) to give you an idea of what to look for.

***Maw* uses Grip and Throw as his main offense. His bark is worse than his bite. Lure him out to one of the platforms with the long catwalks leading to it. Run at him, jump over his head, spin and strike (side slashes on the run are also effective). Repeat 'til he's dead. Be wary at long range—he's prone to slinging a ball of Destruction or two...**

***Yun* likes Blinding and Persuasion. He's easy to beat, with a little patience. When he's invisible, keep running to opposite ends of the room until you can see him again. Then run right at him, step to the side, and slash away. Repeat until he's beat.**



***Boc*'s double-lightsaber attack is very tough, and he's got good aim with Destruction as well. Stay away from fighting him in the open. Take him on in the confines of the corridors, where he can't jump or use Destruction effectively. Quick running-slash attacks are the rule.**

JEDI KNIGHT CHEATS

During gameplay, hit t, then type one of the following:

thereisnotry:	level skip.
whiteflag x:	toggles AI on/off.
deeznuts:	force level up.
eriamjh:	fly.
jediwannabe x:	toggles invulnerability on/off.
red5:	all weapons.
wamprat:	all items.
yodajammies:	mana.
raccoonking:	uber jedi.
imayoda:	light master.
sithlord:	dark master.
5858lvr:	show all map.
slowmo x:	toggles slow motion on/off.

Note: On codes with x, x = 1 is on, x = 0 is off.

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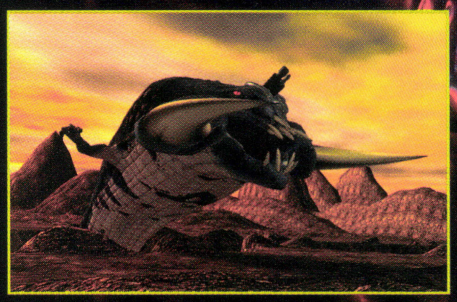
PC Gamer

SUDDENLY, THE WALLS CAME CRASHING DOWN AND ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE.



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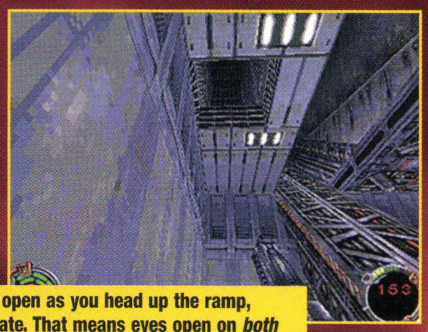
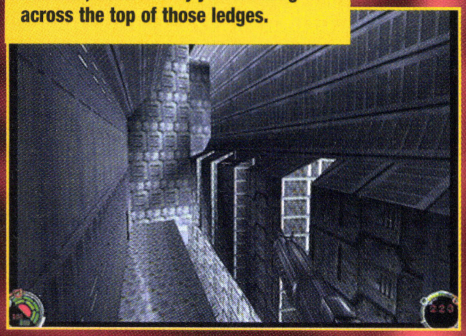


Keep your eyes open as you head up the ramp, riding on the crate. That means eyes open on *both* sides of the ramp. Hike up the gamma (or use the Field Light) to spot those darkened recesses.

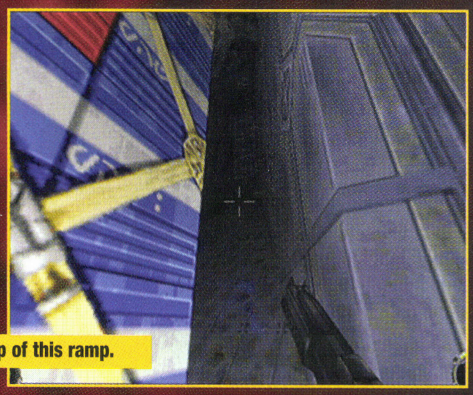
A steep slope is not necessarily impassable. Take a look up here.

Always look over the edge of platforms for any hidden ledges—like this one.

This out-of-place light source conceals a secret, accessed by just walking across the top of those ledges.

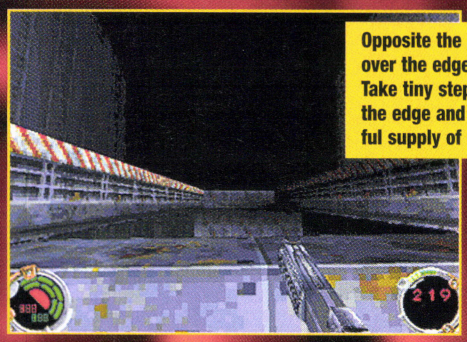


Leap across to this ledge to get to the Rodian's hideout.

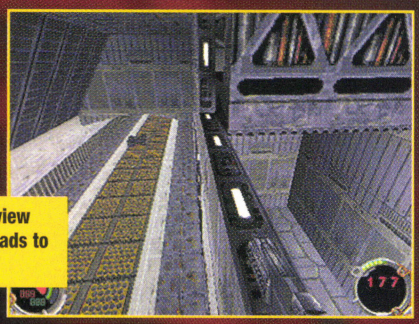


There's a gap in the grating at the top of this ramp.

LEVEL 2

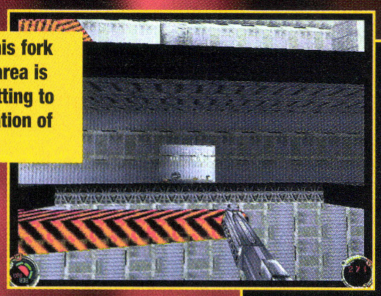


Opposite the huge ship, peer over the edge of this ramp. Take tiny steps to drop off the edge and land in a plentiful supply of power-ups.

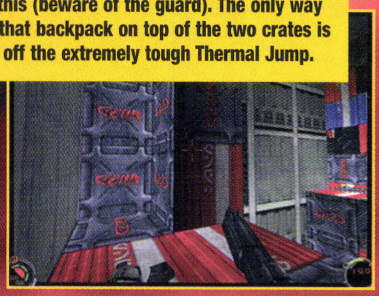


Stand on the rail to view the small gap that leads to a secret area.

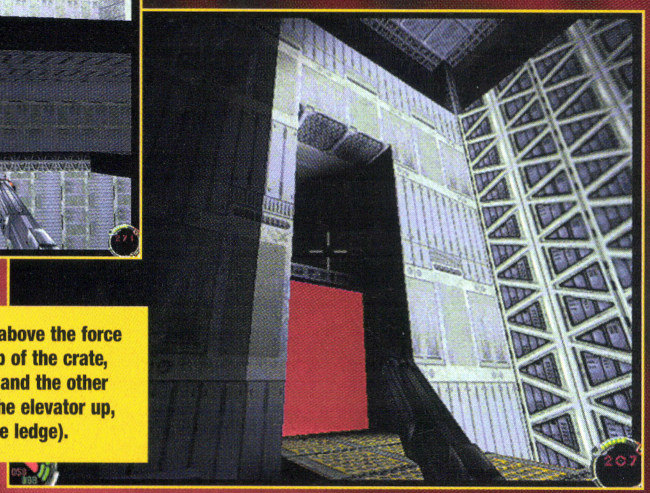
Can you work out this fork puzzle? The secret area is plain as day, but getting to it requires manipulation of the machinery.



Simply jump across from the other crates to reach this (beware of the guard). The only way to get that backpack on top of the two crates is to pull off the extremely tough Thermal Jump.



Two secrets here: one above the force wall (jump onto the top of the crate, then into the opening) and the other right at the top (take the elevator up, then jump across to the ledge).



LEVEL 3

Look in the acid for electricity—it points to a secret.

Again, use the light to spot dark recesses.

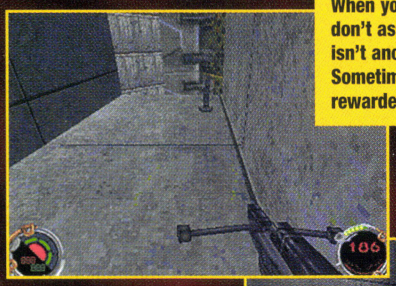
Does Kyle have something to say down here? He does hint that there's something to look for—like this breakable wall.

This darker wall-recess is easy to miss, but it highlights the subtle differences in environment that hint at a hidden area.

Use the Bowcaster to shoot the enemy around the corner, and destroy this wall at the same time.

LEVEL 4

When you find one secret, don't assume that there isn't another nearby. Sometimes you get rewarded twice.



When underwater, look up for gaps in the roof of the submerged tunnel.

At the three-way platform over the water, take the one that slopes upward. Quick-save, then take the one going down. This is a difficult timing-jump from a run in the water, over the edge of the fatal drop, to a small room.

Don't walk past any holes in the ground.

Use the lightsaber to get through the metal meshes.

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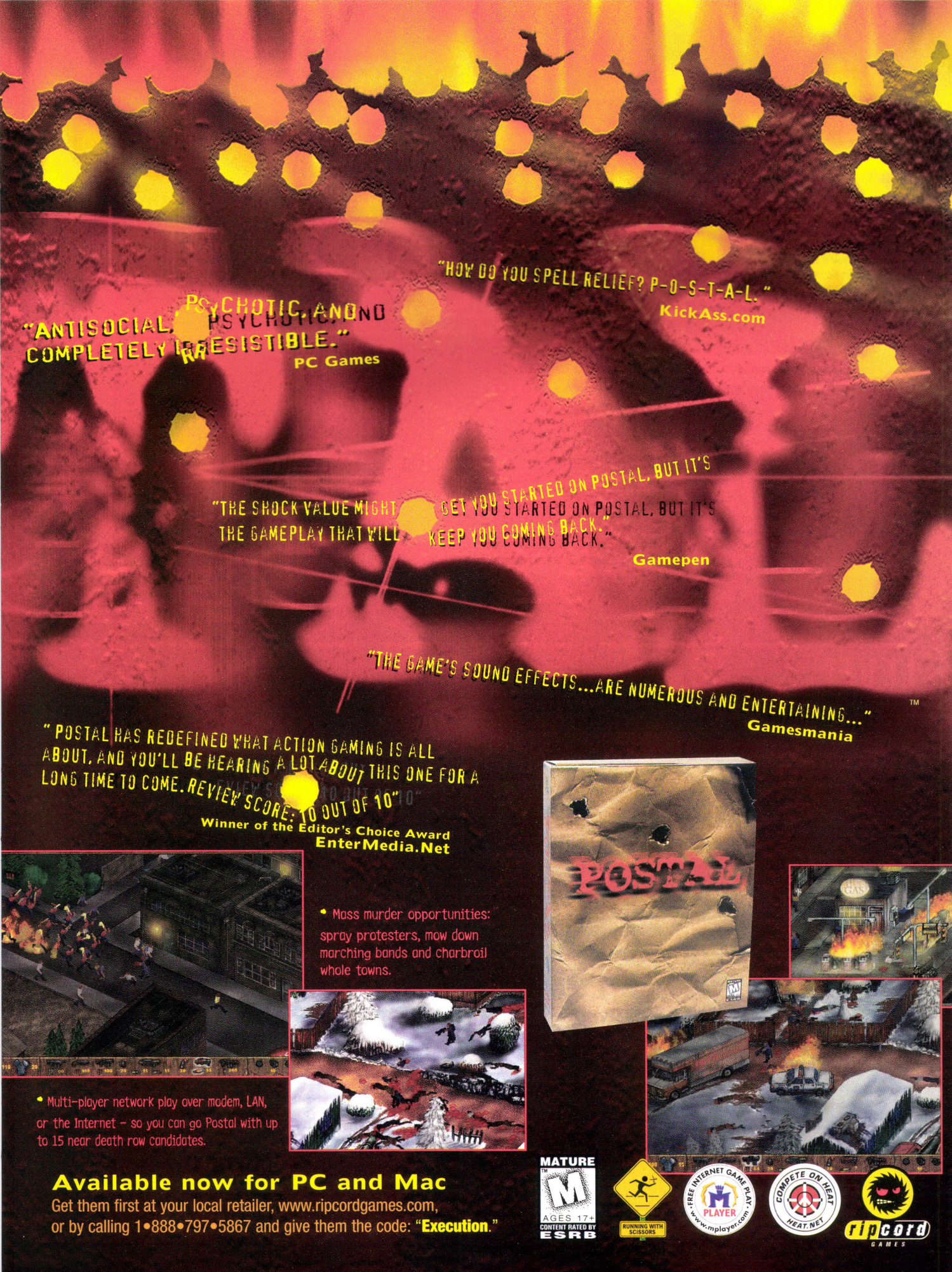
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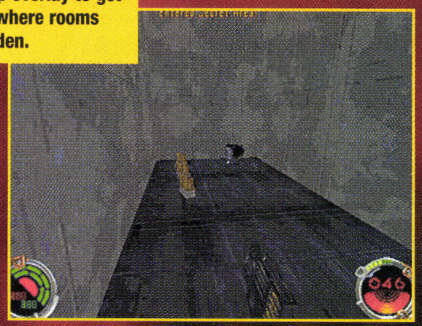
LEVEL 9

In later levels, you'll need to use Force powers to reach some of the secrets. Force Jump will get you to this one.

Use the map overlay to get a sense of where rooms may be hidden.

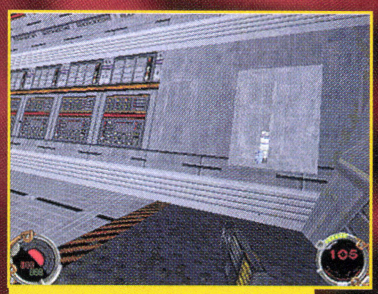


Jump on the barrels to get to this secret.

The wall isn't quite snug enough, leaving a gap that hides a secret area.

See that tiny orange dot in the distance? That's a Super Shield, hidden over the edge. Keep your eyes open.

LEVEL 10

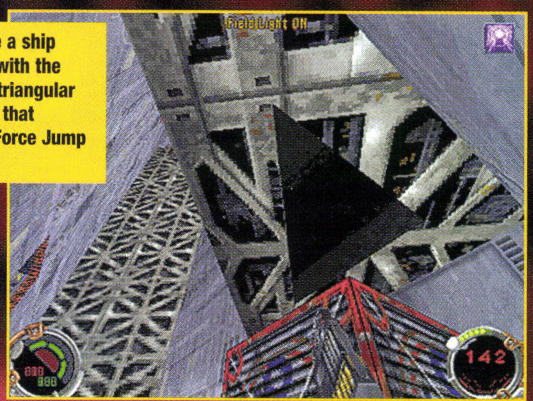


Get the blue key at the bottom of the ramp in the command room full of stormtroopers.

There's a secret at the end of the tight railing, where the red switches need shooting.

Near the beginning, just look behind you to find these soon-to-be-ex-stormtroopers.

Where you can see a ship outside, the room with the crates conceals a triangular entry into a secret that you'll really need Force Jump to access.



Whew! We haven't given everything away, but we've certainly supplied enough info to get you through the game the honest way. Use the cheats if you must—and be ashamed of your inability to master the Force!

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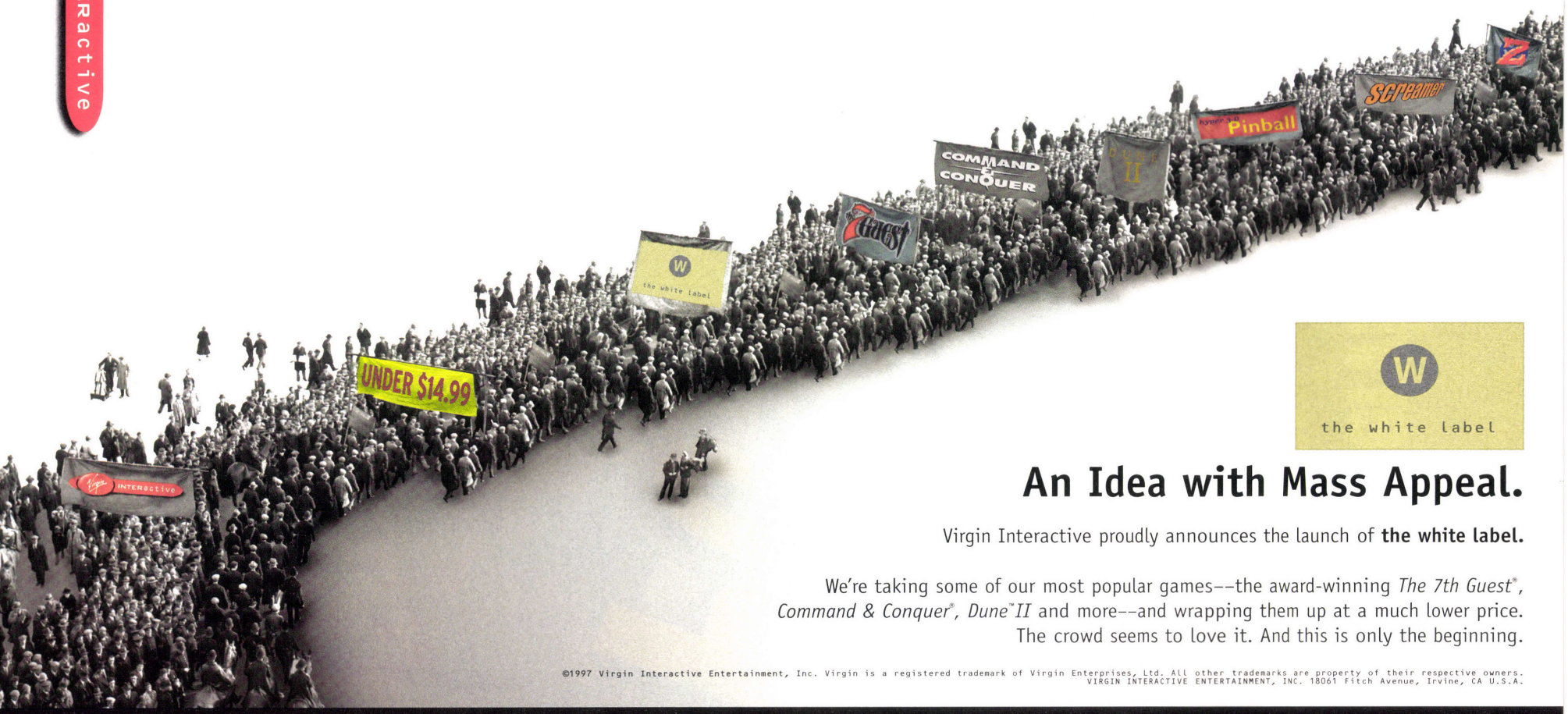

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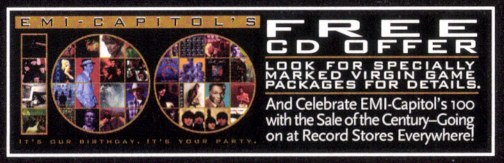

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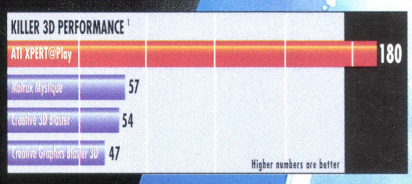

MORE FEATURES

FEATURE	XPERT@Play	Matrox Mystique	Diamond Monster 3D
Triangle Setup Engine	•		
Bilinear/Trilinear Filtering	•		•
Texture Decompression	•		
Alpha Blending/Fog	•		•
Standard Max. Memory	8MB	4MB	4MB
DVD-Quality Video	•		
2D Acceleration (Win 95)	120M	103M	n/a

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NOT JUST SHILOH.
THE WHOLE CIVIL WAR

GRANT • LEE • SHERMAN

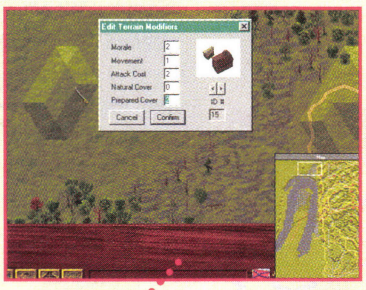
CIVIL WAR 2

GENERALS

Sequel to the best selling Civil War game of 1996

DON'T SETTLE for a slice of history when you can have the whole bloody cake. The battle begun with the best-selling Robert E. Lee: Civil War General continues with 40 authentic battles. Rally the troops and take command as you rewrite history with Civil War Generals 2: Grant, Lee, Sherman.

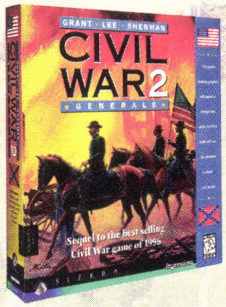
POWERFUL MAP EDITOR



New Unit Types

ALL-NEW FEATURES:

- Fight in Eastern or Western battle theaters as Union or Confederate.
- Map Editor allows you to challenge opponents on your own customized battlefields.
- Command your troops in an overhead view or zoom in for close-up detail.
- New reenactment film footage from Jay Wertz.
- Even more artwork from Mort Kunstler.
- New unit types include siege mortars, horse artillery, frigates and gunboats.
- New terrain includes forts, walls, swamps, water, major roads and coastline.
- Head-to-head play via modem, LAN, Internet and e-mail.
- Battle for FREE on Sierra's Internet gaming system.



Impressions

SIERRA®

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Holiday Gift Guide

This holiday season, choosing gifts for the gamer in your life will be tougher than ever—unless you've got the PC Games *Holiday Gift Guide. We've checked our lists twice, three times, and more to see what's good on the winter shelves. For a sleighful of toys game geeks are sure to love, read on...*

By Daniel Morris

Time was, you could build a kid a wooden puppet or hand him some marbles, and his eyes would light up and he'd say, "Wow, this is the best Christmas ever!" Okay, maybe things were never quite that simple—but still! Being an elf has gotten tougher and tougher. These days, they need advanced computer science degrees, 3D-modeling skills, familiarity with the Windows 95 API—arrghhh! All so Santa can deliver a merry Christmas to gamers.

It can get awfully confusing shopping for the gamer in your life. With the glut of titles hitting the shelves this holiday season, you need a guide to the "sure things"—the software and accessories no gamer will be dismayed to pull out of the gift wrap.

So here goes...a selection of only the cream of this year's huge crop. While there's certainly much more to browse during your holiday shopping, the picks for our Gift Guide are bona fide, certified standouts—and what we'd like to see under our trees. Good luck at the mall, and have fun parking!

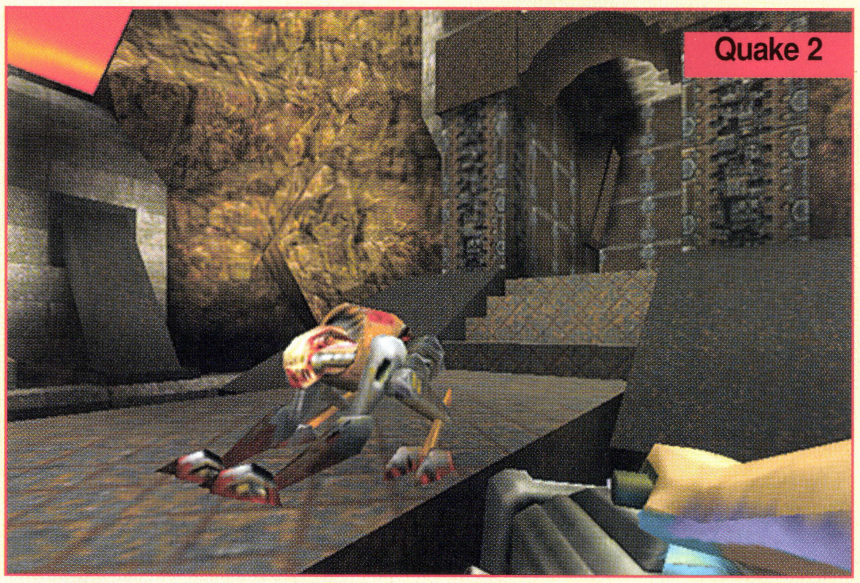
ACTION

So here's the bread and butter, meat and potatoes, blood and guts of gaming—action. These are games where the prime focus is on breaking a sweat (and usually a few heads). You can see one of the finest examples to date, Jedi Knight, featured in this issue. No aficionado of anarchy will be let down by these standout shoot-'em-ups.

Quake 2

What You're Getting: The sequel to Quake, dummy! The quintessential first-person shooter, Quake's eye-popping technology has advanced even further in id's newest title.

Nuts and Bolts: For once, id actually put some thought into the plot of a game's single-player experience. You're among a contingent of space marines invading an alien stronghold to cripple a giant cannon aimed at the Earth. To knock it out, you'll need to mow your way through thick alien



defenses, as well as solve some intricate puzzles.
Why Pick This One?: Quake has developed a vast and loyal community of hardcore gamers who return to it again and again. With id's hit-making history, it's a safe bet that Quake 2 will inspire the same kind of replayability—and multiplayability.
Publisher: Activision; 800-477-3650; www.activision.com

Tomb Raider 2

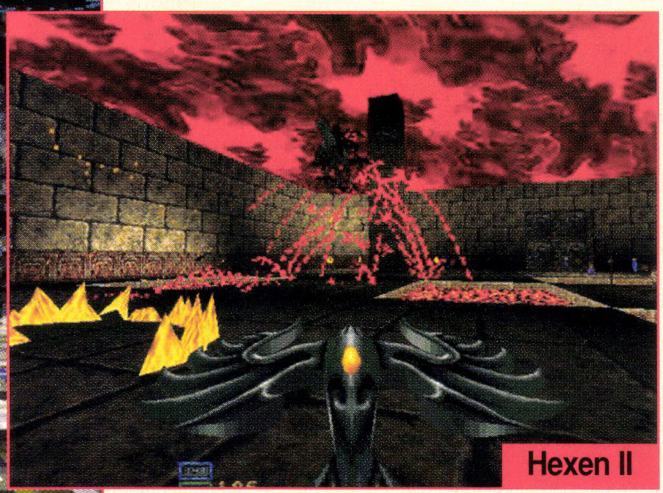
What You're Getting: The follow-up to the megahit Tomb Raider, bringing you the continuing adventures of acrobatic aristocrat Lara Croft.
Nuts and Bolts: An Indiana Jones–style treasure hunt through the ruins of ancient civilizations, featuring challenging puzzles, unscrupulous enemies, and more nasty wildlife than you can shake an Uzi at.
Why Pick This One?: Tomb Raider 2 goes heavier on the action while still packing plenty of exploration and problem-solving. It's a solid choice for someone who doesn't quite have the stomach for the mass carnage of other action games and prefers a more cerebral adventure.
Publisher: Eidos Interactive; www.eidos.com

Starfleet Academy

What You're Getting: *Star Trek* action with a ticket to Starfleet's high-octane proving grounds.
Nuts and Bolts: As a cadet-in-training at the prestigious Starfleet Academy, you'll take command of a starship, master its systems, and direct its personnel. You'll also get a crash course in interstellar combat, with loads of thrilling space battles.
Why Pick This One?: *Star Trek*'s legions of fans make any *Trek* game a safe bet, but Starfleet Academy is already a *PC Games* A-list inductee.
Publisher: Interplay; 800-969-4863; www.interplay.com

Hexen II

What You're Getting: Medieval mayhem, as the Quake engine powers a sword-and-sorcery action setting.
Nuts and Bolts: Players can choose from among a Paladin, Crusader, Necromancer, and Assassin, and fight according to that character's special traits. Magically turn enemies into sheep, or just cleave them with an old-fashioned double-sided axe.
Why Pick This One?: Hexen II concentrates more on "stuff" than most other first-person action games, and it allows players to employ a wide variety of creative magical weapons and inventory items during the game.
Publisher: Activision; 800-477-3650; www.activision.com



STRATEGY

This is a resoundingly popular gaming genre: both real-time and turn-based strategy games are consistently among the most-played games online or off. With a staggering number of titles arriving this winter (we stopped counting at about 50), here's a list of the elite special forces that will disappoint no armchair general…

Starcraft

What You're Getting: The next real-time strategy game from the makers of Warcraft II, one of the titles that ignited the real-time revolution.
Nuts and Bolts: Humanity's got its hands full as two alien races, the Protoss and the Zurg, compete with starfaring Terrans for control of space. Combat mixed with resource management for a hectic real-time war.
Why Pick This One?: Blizzard, who also designed the RPG standout Diablo, has an outstanding track record of producing hit games. Starcraft shouldn't be any break with tradition.
Publisher: Blizzard Entertainment; 800-953-7669; www.blizzard.com

civilizations in a real-time scramble for superiority. More involved than your average real-time harvest-and-fight game, Age of Empires requires studious attention to resource development, research, political wheeling and dealing, and steady advancement from Stone Age to Iron Age.

Why Pick This One?: Its more realistic/historical flavor and depth make Age an attractive pick for fans of more thoughtful strategy who still crave real-time excitement.

Publisher: Microsoft; 800-426-9400; www.microsoft.com

Total Annihilation

What You're Getting: Real-time strategy in a true-3D environment, with polygonal units and terrain.

Nuts and Bolts: The next step in the continuing evolution of Command & Conquer–style games, Total Annihilation adds full 3D graphics and a host of inventive combat elements. There will be approximately 150 units to command in all, with more planned for release on the game's official Web site.

Why Pick This One?: In variety and graphics, Total Annihilation is a notch above the many futuristic real-time games trying to elbow their way into the market.

Publisher: GT Interactive; 800-610-4847; www.gtinteractive.com

Age of Empires

What You're Getting: A real-time game of ancient cultures more in the tradition of turn-based classics like Civilization.

Nuts and Bolts: You control one of twelve ancient gore fans won't be disappointed.

Publisher: Bungie; 800-295-0060; www.bungie.com

Dark Reign

What You're Getting: A solid challenger to the real-time space-strategy crown.

Nuts and Bolts: Hoping to distinguish itself with solid (and customizable) artificial intelligence, Dark Reign's sophisticated AI controls allow for such tactics as passive ambush-style ops and varying degrees of pursuit and reaction. With the geography greatly affecting the outcome of the fight, new tactical considerations come into play when seizing and ceding terrain.

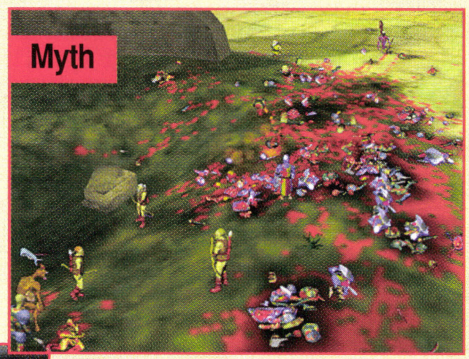
Why Pick This One?: Allowing more control over unit AI than most strategy games, Dark

Myth

What You're Getting: 3D battles between warring fantasy armies.

Nuts and Bolts: Graphically luscious and amazingly gory, Myth gives you real-time control over such units as firebomb-hurling dwarves, archers, and knights. Fighting over 3D terrain allows for complex tactical considerations.

Why Pick This One?: Fantasy buffs will have a field day commanding ghouls and archers in epic struggles. And with features like rolling heads and blood that stains the battlefield,



Reign should satisfy picky generals who demand the most from their digital underlings.
Publisher: Activision; 800-477-3650; www.activision.com

ADVENTURE

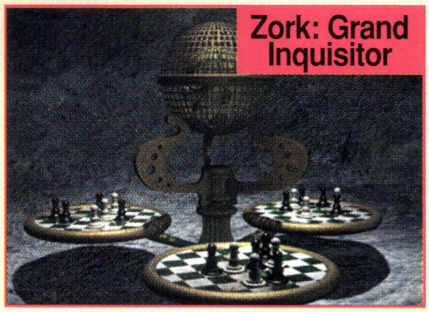
PC games grant you the enviable opportunity to spend a few hours playing the kind of make-believe you really can believe. Adventure games in particular offer the kind of virtual worlds where heroes are heroes, villains are villains, and epic struggles between good and evil play out in stunningly rendered environments.

Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee

What You're Getting: A much-hyped platform-style adventure casting you as Abe, the reluctant savior of his slave species.
Nuts and Bolts: Using a new interface called GameSpeak, you'll be able to issue simple commands to your fellow laborers. As simple as "Stay" or "Follow me," the orders give you the ability to direct your amigos' actions as you search for a way out of the factory where your overseers are planning an unseemly demise for the lot of you.
Why Pick This One?: Essentially a side-scrolling platform game, Oddworld looks to invent a new gaming genre with its action-oriented but puzzle-heavy adventuring.
Publisher: GT Interactive; 800-610-4847; www.gtinteractive.com

Zork: Grand Inquisitor

What You're Getting: Zork, one of the PC's most venerable institutions, returns to its offbeat roots.
Nuts and Bolts: A puzzle-heavy trip to Hades is the focal point for this adventure in the curiously uncertain world of Zork. Activision has put less emphasis on the graphics and focused more on bringing back the sense of fun and strangeness that's kept Zork going since its all-text era.
Why Pick This One?: The Zork franchise is rock-solid among veteran adventure-gamers, and a return to the game's roots should be more than welcome for its fans.

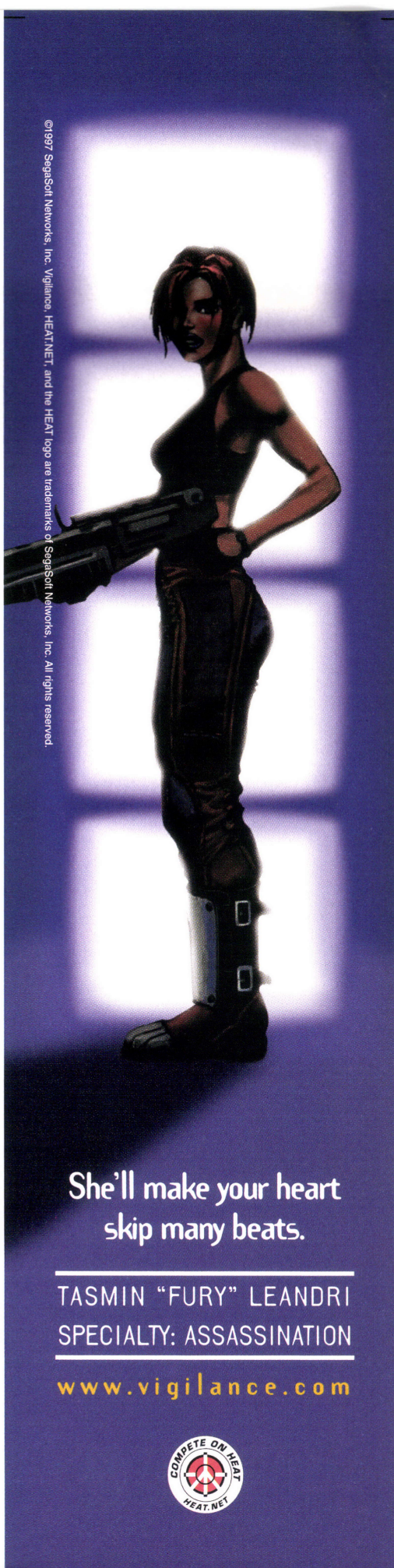

Zork: Grand Inquisitor

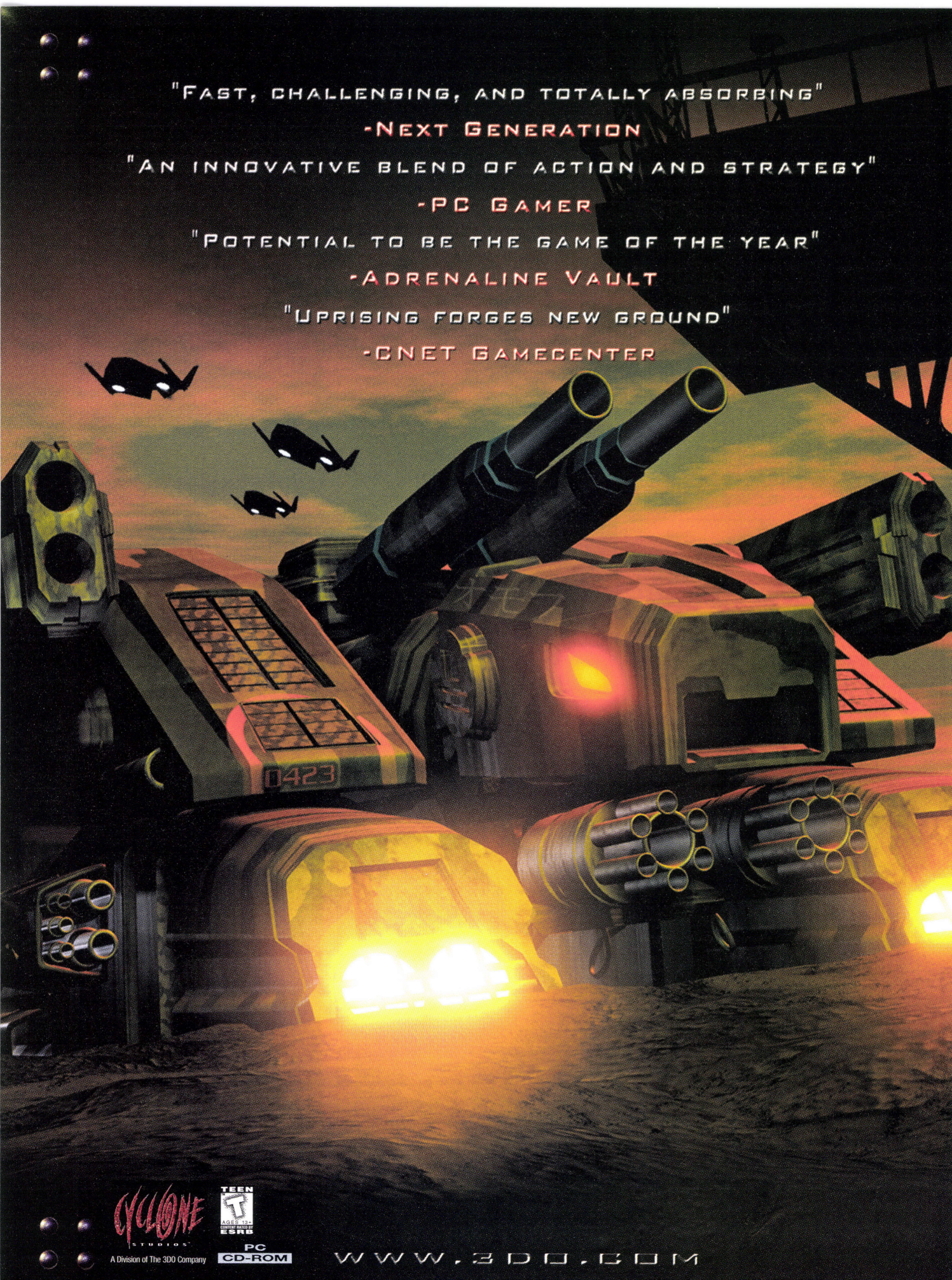
Publisher: Activision; 800-477-3650; www.activision.com

Riven

What You're Getting: The sequel to Myst, the biggest hit in PC gaming history.
Nuts and Bolts: Another surreal trip.
Why Pick This One?: Myst's gigantic success has left a legion of fans hungry for the sequel.
Publisher: Red Orb; 800-548-1798; www.cyan.com

Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee




"Fast, challenging, and totally absorbing"
-Next Generation
"An innovative blend of action and strategy"
-PC Gamer
"Potential to be the game of the year"
-Adrenaline Vault
"Uprising forges new ground"
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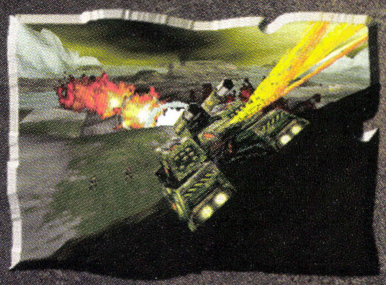

[HEART-POUNDING ACTION]

[COMMAND ENTIRE ARMIES]

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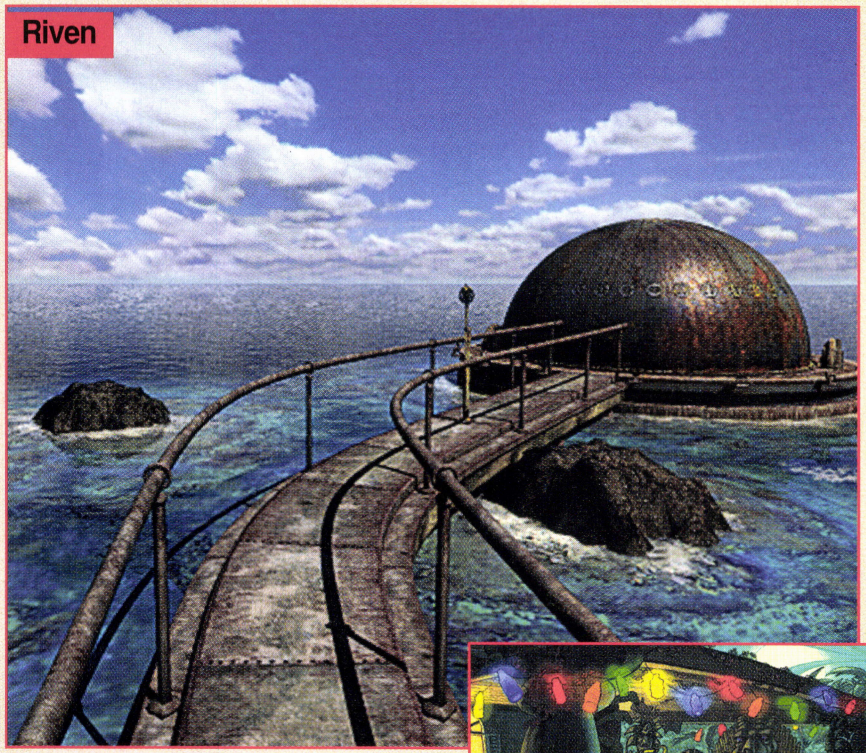
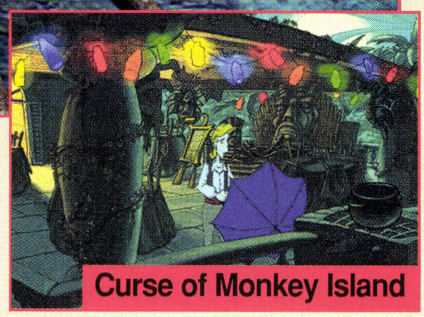




SIM

These are the games that put you in the driver's seat, whether on land, sea, air, or in space. Sims vary in scope and sophistication, but they all appeal to gamers who enjoy having their hands on a hot piece of hardware.

Dark Earth

What You're Getting: An epic fantasy set in a future Earth ravaged by a comet strike.

Nuts and Bolts: Giant dust clouds are blocking out the sun's light, and evil sorcerers are plotting to let the refuge city of Sparta fall into the grip of darkness. As Arkhan, a young guard in Sparta, you must save the city—and yourself—before a magical virus claims you.

Why Pick This One?: Designer Kalisto Entertainment has developed an amazingly deep and rich game environment in which to tell a grandly operatic story. Gamers who appreciate an involving plot will be well-rewarded by this one.

Publisher: MicroProse; 800-879-7529; www.darkearth.com

The Curse of Monkey Island

What You're Getting: A conversation-driven, graphically rich adventure from George Lucas' interactive storytellers.

Nuts and Bolts: You're a laid-back pirate in search of a way to rescue your old flame from a malicious phantom buccaneer. Snappy, smart conversations and intriguing puzzles will get you closer to the goal, and with first-rate scripting, voice actors, and animation, the ride promises to be a fantastic one.

Why Pick This One?: It's a high-tech and humorous follow-up to one of the oldest and most revered Lucas titles, The Secret of Monkey Island. 'Nuff said.

Publisher: LucasArts; 800-985-8227; www.lucasarts.com

Wing Commander: Prophecy

What You're Getting: Installment number five in the Origin space-combat series.

Nuts and Bolts: A new alien menace threatens space, and you're the young starpilot thrown onto the front line of humanity's defense. With Mark Hamill and Malcolm McDowell's roles as fleet commanders helping to steer the FMV plot-development sequences, Wing Commander: Prophecy promises as much story as star-warring.

Why Pick This One?: Space sims come with no finer pedigree than this epic's. The Wing Commander series has set high marks in both gameplay and production values.

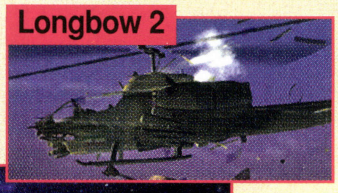
Publisher: Origin; 800-245-4525; www.origin.com

Longbow 2

What You're Getting: A highly detailed helicopter sim from Jane's Combat Simulations, a leading developer of accurate military-vehicle re-creations.

Nuts and Bolts: Picking up on the success of its predecessor, Longbow 2 adds massive multiplay options with huge, sprawling battles coordinated by flight leaders. The night-fighting effects and ability to ride along as a side gunner are just two examples of the touches that make its the chopper sim to beat in 1998.

Why Pick This One?: Last year's AH-64D



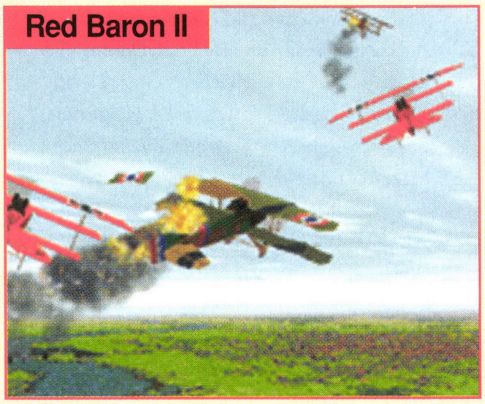
Longbow was our Flight Sim of the Year and a unanimous pick for best helicopter sim pretty much everywhere. Longbow 2 only ups the ante.
Publisher: Electronic Arts; 800-245-4525; www.ea.com

Fighter Squadron

Red Baron II

What You're Getting: The World War I–themed sequel to the popular Red Baron.
Nuts and Bolts: Take to the embattled skies of Europe in a quest to become a fighter ace. No missiles or radar—just a sharp pair of eyes and a machine gun!
Why Pick This One?: Good flight sims create loyal followings, and no WWI sim has as big a following as Red Baron. Its sequel is an almost-guaranteed crowd-pleaser.
Publisher: Sierra On-Line; 800-757-7707; www.sierra.com

Publisher: Activision; 800-477-3650; www.activision.com



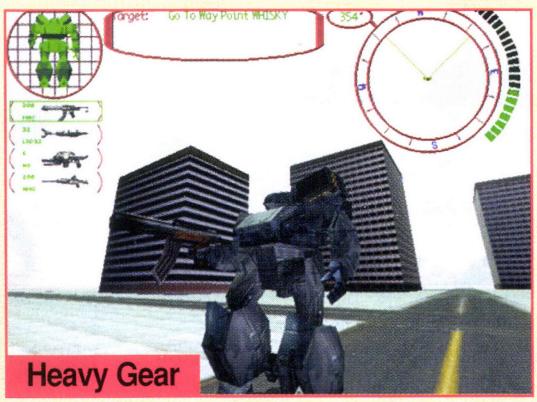
Red Baron II

Heavy Gear

What You're Getting: Space-age anarchy in mechanized battlesuits.
Nuts and Bolts: Activision lost the rights to FASA's profitable MechWarrior license but signed up the rival, and increasingly popular, Heavy Gear license. These Gears are smaller and more mobile than the rumbling BattleMechs of the FASA system, and gameplay is centered more on speed and cunning than on sheer firepower.
Why Pick This One?: The same design team that brought us the brilliant MechWarrior 2 has put its stamp on Heavy Gear, and that alone should draw the interest of many rabid fans.
Publisher: Activision; 800-477-3650; www.activision.com

Fighter Squadron: The Screamin' Demons Over Europe

What You're Getting: A comprehensive full-3D military flight sim over World War II Europe.
Nuts and Bolts: From spunky Spitfires to lumbering Lancasters, it delivers a wealth of WWII air action for the military buff. Whether you're flying simple dogfights or challenging bombing raids, this installment in the Fighter Squadron series will sport awesome graphics and impeccable authenticity.
Why Pick This One?: World War II offers the enthusiast a huge variety of options in re-creating air combat, and Demons looks to faithfully present quite a lot of them.



Heavy Gear

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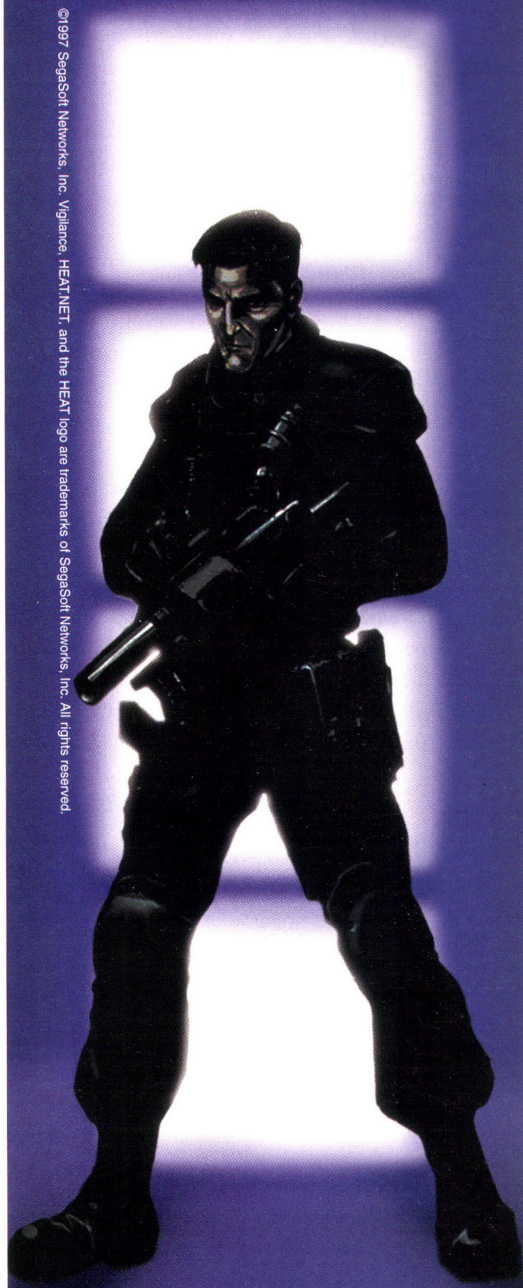

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SPORTS

When it comes to replay value—the sheer number of hours a game is capable of entertaining you—there are few games that pack more punch than an excellent sports title. This selection of All-Stars is sure to be on your armchair coach's list.

NHL 98

What You're Getting: Hockey at its best, from the Electronic Arts line that has been tough to beat since the series began.

Nuts and Bolts: While the NHL series has always been hailed for its excitement and graphics, EA took to heart customers' requests that it shore up AI. The 1998 edition is a vast improvement in gameplay realism, more accurately reflecting the feel and tactics of actual NHL action.

Why Pick This One?: If there's a hockey nut in your life, you know how deep the obsession runs. With NHL 98, the obsession may become permanent.

Publisher: Electronic Arts; 800-245-4525; www.ea.com

Links LS '98

What You're Getting: The best golf game on the market, bar none. High praise indeed, given the quantity and quality of its competition.

Nuts and Bolts: Take photorealistic graphics for a large selection of courses, add a brilliant physics model that almost perfectly captures the feel of golf, and throw in multiplayer features like opponents who stand with you on the course to provide extra pressure during those important putts. It all adds up to the greatest PC golf experience possible.

Why Pick This One?: For the avid golfer in the family, Links LS '98 will be an instant and unkickable addiction.

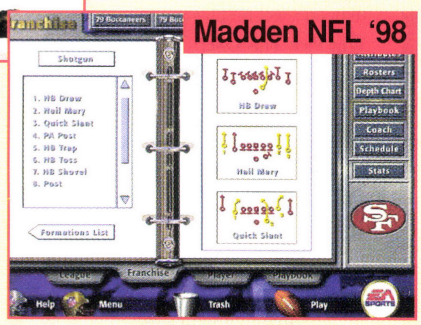
Publisher: Access Software; 800-800-4880; www.accesssoftware.com

Madden NFL '98

What You're Getting: Boom! A revamped Madden for the PC.

Nuts and Bolts: After a bit of a false start with last year's PC release, EA unveils Madden NFL '98 to much early applause. With playbooks modeled after each pro team, the AI should look surprisingly like the real opposition you'd face from the sideline. A play editor allows you to craft your own attacks, defenses, and special-teams stunts.

Why Pick This One?: A move to full-3D graphics and closer attention to gameplay will make Madden the choice for gridiron gamers.



Publisher: Electronic Arts; 800-245-4525; www.ea.com

FPS: Trophy Rivers

What You're Getting: Fantastic fly fishing from the folks who brought you Trophy Bass.

Nuts and Bolts: Get your waders wet as you step into Sierra's fly fishing simulation. Last year's Trophy Bass was a surprise smash hit (a surprise, that is, to everyone but fishermen, who knew a great game when they saw one). Trophy Rivers now moves to fly casting.

Why Pick This One?: It may seem off the wall, but no other game could please the fly caster beset with cabin fever more.

Publisher: Sierra On-Line; 800-757-7707; www.sierra.com

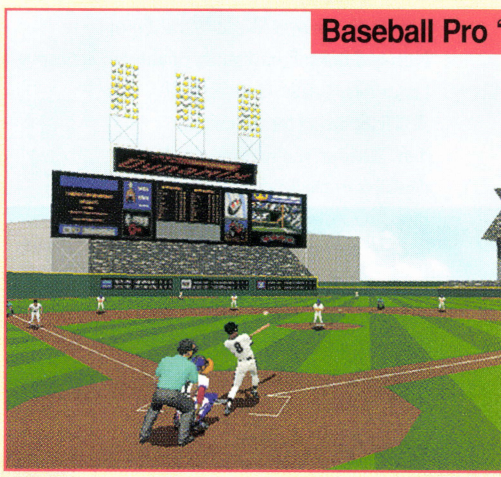
FPS: Baseball Pro '98

What You're Getting: A complete baseball sim for the fan of action on the diamond and in the executive skybox.

Nuts and Bolts: In addition to a graphically rich and comprehensive on-field baseball game, FPS: Baseball '98 offers a rewarding statistical and managerial package as well. Track player stats closely and take note of slumps and hot streaks. Make key trades to bolster your roster for the pennant run.

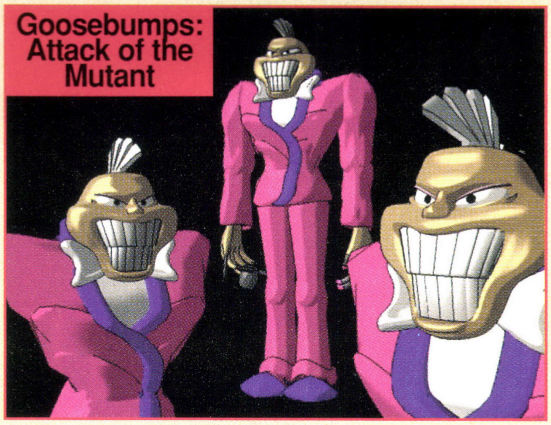
Why Pick This One?: For a combination of down-and-dirty baseball and down-and-dirtier management sim, FPS: Baseball Pro '98 is a blue-chip prospect.

Publisher: Sierra On-Line; 800-757-7707; www.sierra.com



FAMILY

That shiny computer in the den is supposed to bring the whole world closer together. And it's supposed to start right at home. Without wanting to sound too much like Bill Gates (who's allegedly put an offer down on the North Pole, by the way), the promise of family entertainment on the computer is already here. For example…



Chaos Island

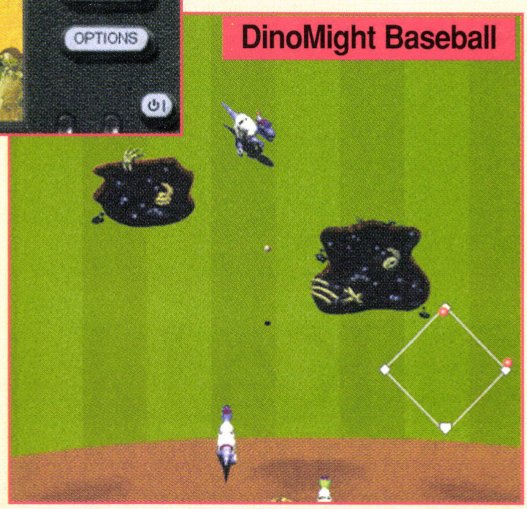
What You're Getting: A kids' real-time strategy game based on *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*.
Nuts and Bolts: The blockbuster film becomes a PC game where players manage a team of scientists and dinosaurs in a fight to protect their island from menacing dinos and human hunters. Players raise dinosaur eggs to build dino armies, managing island resources in real-time.
Why Pick This One?: C'mon, this is a no-brainer! The voices of Jeff Goldblum, Richard Attenborough, Julianne Moore, Vince Vaughn, and others seal the deal in amber.
Publisher: DreamWorks Interactive; www.dreamworksgames.com

Goosebumps: Attack of the Mutant

What You're Getting: R.L. Stine's popular books (and the TV show they inspired) receive their second PC translation.
Nuts and Bolts: A supervillain called the Masked Mutant is making lots of trouble—y'know, plotting world conquest and stuff. Your job in this first-person graphical adventure is to team up with the League of Good Guys and make your way through 15 levels of fright.
Why Pick This One?: Anyone with kids knows *Goosebumps* is a winner. Smart and scary, it's a terrific franchise for the computer.
Publisher: DreamWorks Interactive; www.dreamworks.com

DinoMight Baseball

What You're Getting: Dinosaur fun in a baseball league formed by prehistoric teams.
Nuts and Bolts: Dinosaurs and dugouts? What's a more natural combination than that? Not only do you get a family-friendly baseball game (complete with such features as tar pits in the outfield), but the game's DinoVision TV interviews let you talk to the dinosaurs about their species.



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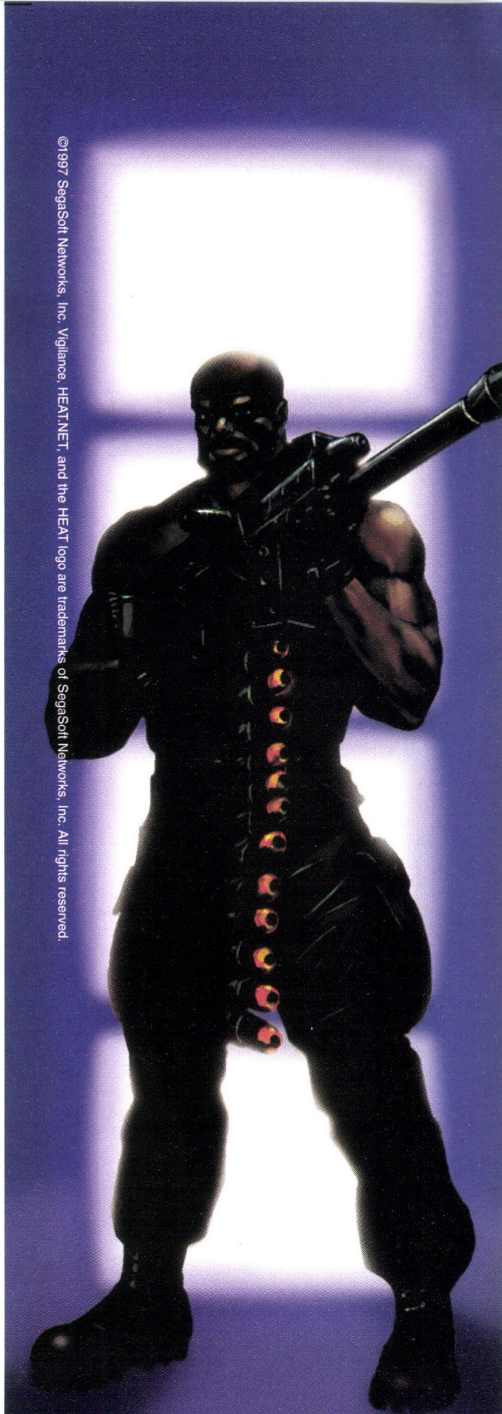

"Impenetrable" is not in his very limited vocabulary.

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www.kali.net

Why Pick This One?: In this charming and creative game, boys and girls alike will have fun with the DinoMight League.
Publisher: Microforum; 800-465-2323; www.microforum.com

Grossology

What You're Getting: A decidedly icky way for kids to learn biology.
Nuts and Bolts: Edutainment gets messy as SegaSoft adapts the book series to CD-ROM. Kids get a grand tour of the body's less appealing functions, from snot to burps to scabs to smelly feet, with a dose of education during the fun. Exploratory labs and games like The Drool Show keep things rolling.
Why Pick This One?: Grossology talks in a kid's own gooey language—and entertains and informs as much as it grosses out.
Publisher: SegaSoft; 888-734-2763; www.segasoft.com

Math Invaders

What You're Getting: A different kind of first-person action game, where solving word problems is the key to success.

Math Invaders

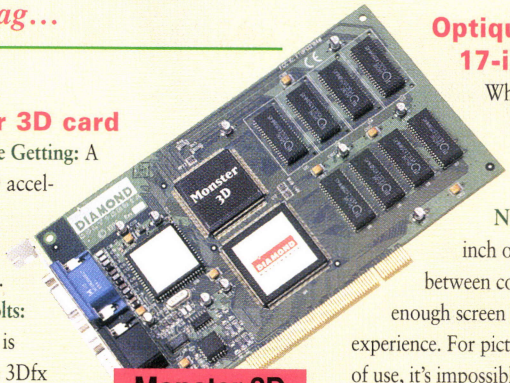
Nuts and Bolts: Played in much the same style as "big-boy" 3D shooters, Math Invaders offers fairly unobtrusive math skill–building instead of skull-cracking. The word-problem challenges are woven as naturally as possible into the adventure to keep kids moving—and learning.
Why Pick This One?: It's one of the best of the "They'll be having so much fun they won't realize they're learning" school of kids' game.
Publisher: Simon & Schuster Interactive; 800-910-0099; www.ssiinteractive.com

STOCKING STUFFERS

Man cannot live on game software alone. Here are some of the assorted goodies in Santa's Grab Bag...

Monster 3D card

What You're Getting: A first-rate 3D accelerator for intense 3D acceleration.
Nuts and Bolts: Monster 3D is based on the 3Dfx Voodoo Graphics chip, which is, so far, the leading chipset for the acceleration craze. We've had Monster 3D in systems for a long time now, and they continue to give us beautiful, trouble-free graphics boosts.



Monster 3D card

Why Pick This One?: 3D acceleration is fast becoming mandatory for gaming, and if you need a solid, reliable board, this fits the bill. For about $175, it's tough to beat.
Company: Diamond Multimedia; 800-468-5846; www.diamondmm.com

MS SideWinder

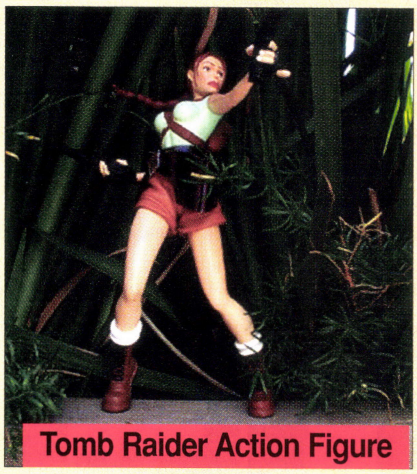
What You're Getting: One of the better all-around joysticks or gamepads on the market.
Nuts and Bolts: Native to Win 95, Microsoft's SideWinder joystick and gamepad are daisy-chainable (you can string them together for multiplay on one PC), easily programmable, and relatively cheap ($40 each).

SideWinder Gamepad

Why Pick This One?: The Microsoft peripherals best embody the "plug-and-play" ethic: you're set up and playing within a few minutes of opening the box.
Company: Microsoft; 800-426-9400; www.microsoft.com

Optiquest V775 17-inch monitor

What You're Getting: A top-of-the-line gaming monitor if your current one is no longer up to snuff.
Nuts and Bolts: ViewSonic's 17-inch offering is a good compromise between cost and performance, with enough screen size to add a lot to the gaming experience. For picture clarity, resolution, and ease of use, it's impossible to beat at the price point (around $600).
Why Pick This One?: A lot of people fail to realize that today's bleeding-edge games are best served by a good, large-screen monitor. The Optiquest V775 is your best choice for the money, especially if your gamer's got more expert demands than "a new joystick, please."
Company: ViewSonic; 800-888-8583; www.viewsonic.com


Tomb Raider Action Figure

Tomb Raider Action Figure

What You're Getting: A super-sized Lara Croft action figure from Toy Biz.
Nuts and Bolts: Why confine this bodacious bounty hunter to the edges of a monitor? Toy Biz offers this very attractive figurine as a handy toy for any...well, guy.
Why Pick This One?: C'mon, with a smile like that...?
Company: Toy Biz

Tiger Duke 3D

Tiger Electronics' Duke Nukem 3D

What You're Getting: A hand-held electronic version of 3D Realms' action hit.

Nuts and Bolts: "It's time to kick ass and chew bubble gum...and I'm all out of gum." Duke is the baddest alien butt-kicker of them all, and his adventures have been translated from the PC to this new hand-held format.

Why Pick This One?: Because the only thing more fun than romping with Duke is romping with him on the road.

Company: Tiger Electronics; www.tigertoys.com

Dilbert's Desktop Games

What You're Getting: America's favorite cubicle-dweller in a set of fun games and activities.

Nuts and Bolts: Simple, non–gamer-oriented games like Dogbert's CEO Simulator and Downsizing with the Can-o-Matic are designed to go for the funnybone. There are also hilarious side apps like a Screen Invader that sends Dilbert characters onto your screen when you're in other programs, adding a pithy cheer-up note.

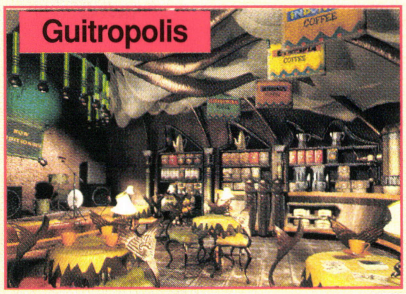
Why Pick This One?: Dilbert fans can have a slice of their hero's misadventures at home or office.

Publisher: DreamWorks Interactive; www.dreamworksgames.com

Guitropolis

What You're Getting: A multimedia guide to learning the guitar, presented as a game in which you play a rising young star building a career in the music industry.

Nuts and Bolts: You start at the beginning, learning how to care for and tune your guitar, basic chords,


Guitropolis

and so on. Pretty soon you're learning simple songs, playing in front of a backup band, and eventually recording your hit record in the studio.

Why Pick This One?: It's perfect for those of us who have always fiddled with guitars without ever learning what to actually *do* with one.

Publisher: Alfred Publishing; 818-891-5999; www.guitropolis.com

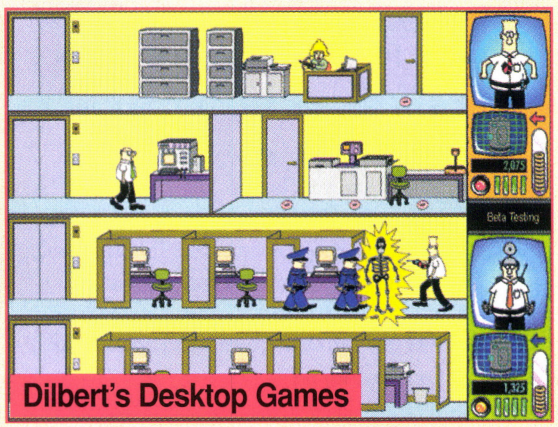
You Don't Know Jack! Sports and You Don't Know Jack! TV

What You're Getting: The ultimate PC party game additions for sports and the boob tube.

Nuts and Bolts: You Don't Know Jack! is arguably the most fun any group of trivia-trumpeting people can have at a computer. These new sets of questions let you test your chops at the sporting life and TV trivia.

Why Pick This One?: You don't need to be a gamer to have a blast with Jack—a brain and a sense of humor are the only requirements.

Publisher: Berkeley Systems; 800-344-5541; www.berksys.com ■



Dilbert's Desktop Games

Bargain Packs

Looking for a bunch of games at bargain price? These compilations offer a variety of yesterday's titles in affordable bunches.

Golf: The Ultimate Collection

What You're Getting: Four golfing CD-ROMs bundled by SegaSoft.

Nuts and Bolts: British Open Golf features the Royal Troon course in Scotland; Greg Norman Ultimate Challenge Golf puts you head-to-head with the Shark; Picture Perfect Golf offers postcard-quality graphics; and GolfAmerica is a multimedia course resource.

Why Pick This One?: It's easy one-stop golfing value for the duffer.

Publisher: SegaSoft; 800-723-7288; www.segasoft.com

Fighters Anthology

What You're Getting: A selection of classic flight sims from Jane's Combat Simulations.

Nuts and Bolts: Contains the games Advanced Tactical Fighters, NATO Fighters, and U.S. Navy Fighters '97.

Why Pick This One?: Flight-sim fans know Jane's is the best, and this trilogy of classics is sure to satisfy them if they missed these the first time around.

Publisher: Electronic Arts; 800 245-4525; www.janes.ea.com

Conquer the World

What You're Getting: A collection of classic strategy games from master designer Sid Meier.

Nuts and Bolts: Railroad Tycoon Deluxe, Transport Tycoon, Pirates! Gold, and Colonization.

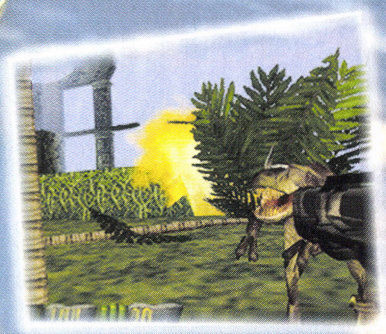
Why Pick This One?: Sid Meier's genius is on display in these early pioneers of modern strategy gaming.

Publisher: MicroProse; 800-879-7529; www.microprose.com

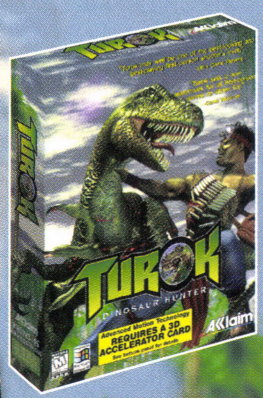
Big game. Bigger weapons.

VARIABLE AGGRESSION PROFILES MAKE EACH ENEMY BEHAVE UNIQUELY!

UNRIVALED DEXTERITY AND CONTROL! RUN, JUMP, CLIMB, SWIM AND AIM IN ANY DIRECTION!



14 WEAPONS FROM THE GRENADE LAUNCHER AND PLASMA RIFLE TO THE ATOMIC FUSION CANNON!



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MATURE M AGES 17+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Designed for Microsoft Windows 95

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Enter the world of Myth: The Fallen Lords, a three-dimensional landscape of blood-soaked hills and carnage-filled valleys. Where the undead lurk in ambush under bridges, behind trees, submerged in swamps. Where your weary troops can see their haggard faces reflected in the water they wade through. Where lightning blasts men into cinders, and explosions shake and scorch the ground. Where you view the horrors of war from any angle, cruising over the battlefield in real time. Where "realism" takes on a terrible new significance.

Call 800 295-0060 or download the demo from www.bungie.com if you feel like you're ready for the biggest uphill battle of your life.

Available for Windows® 95 and Mac™ OS.

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Battle your way through richly detailed deserts, rainy swamps, and snowy mountain passes in pursuit of victory.

Myth's 3d engine brings to life explosions that char the landscape and send limbs flying across the battlefield trailing gore.

Weather changes dramatically, climbing hills puts you at a disadvantage, even your own tracks left in the snow and mud betray you.

Play multiplayer games like capture the flag and king of the hill over the Internet through bungie.net, our free online gaming service.*

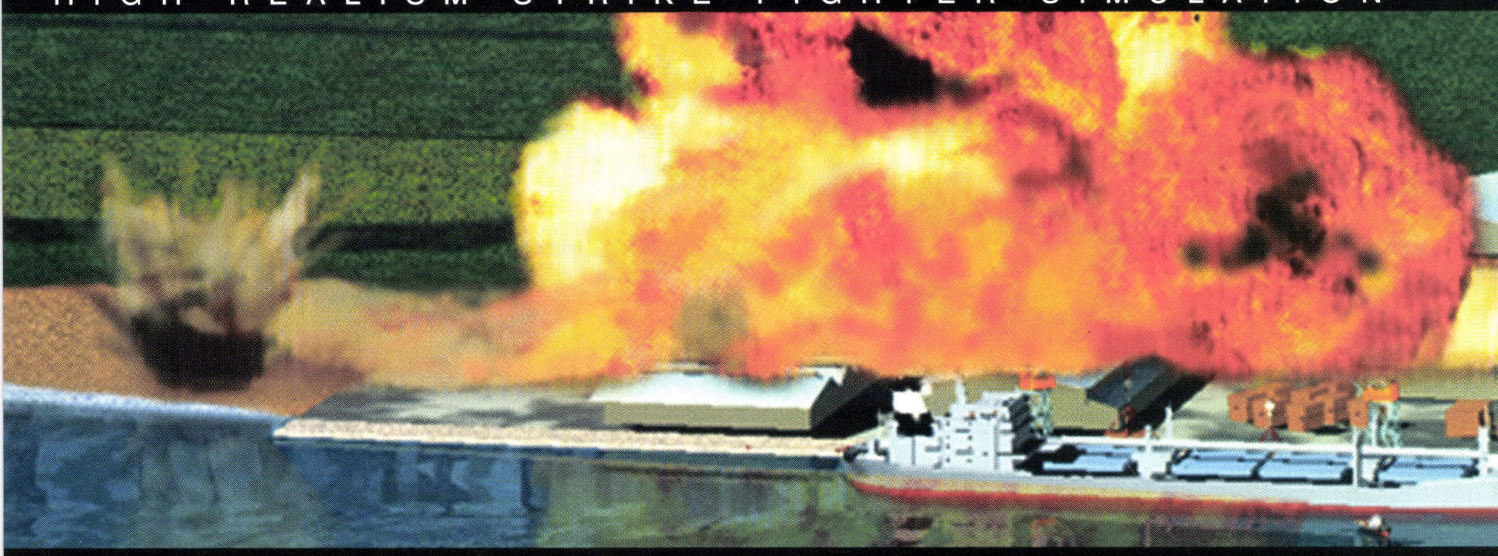
BUNGIE

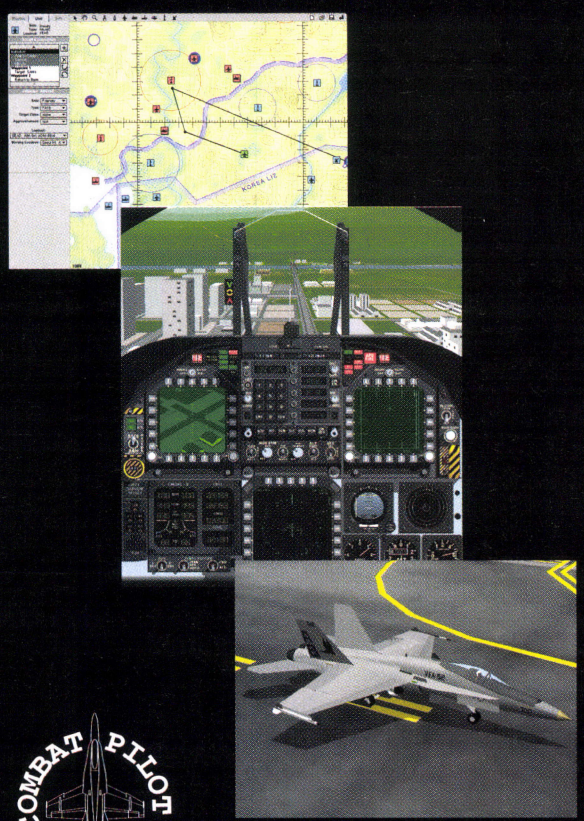
Myth
THE FALLEN LORDS

F/A-18 KOREA

The latest in hardcore realism from the engineers of the the award-winning *F/A-18 Hornet 3.0,* **F/A-18: KOREA**, finally brings the realism and quality of genuine military simulators to your Windows '95/NT4 PC or PowerMac.

HIGH-REALISM STRIKE FIGHTER SIMULATION





3Dfx Screen shot

F/A-18: KOREA is the culmination of over 5 years development by a small, dedicated team of engineers and artists who have always known what it takes to please the discriminating "simmer". Arcade game players need not apply! F/A-18: KOREA features the most accurate avionics and flight dynamics of any simulation ever produced, without compromising game play.

Utilizing the latest 3D technology, F/A-18: KOREA is able to provide the industry's highest resolutions and frame rates. F/A-18: KOREA offers texture mapped 3Dfx Voodoo and Voodoo Rush graphics, as well as our own proprietary flat shaded differential scan conversion graphics for exceptionally fast and crisp visuals.

F/A-18: KOREA provides over 90 minutes of multimedia training, with diagrams, movies and voice dialog, as well as extensive printed documentation written by a former Marine "Strike-U" instructor and F/A-18 Hornet pilot.

F/A18: KOREA's mission creator/editor allows you to design highly intelligent missions with detailed instructions for each computer controlled player. Dictate the behavior and assignments of friendly and enemy airplanes, SAM sites and ground vehicles.

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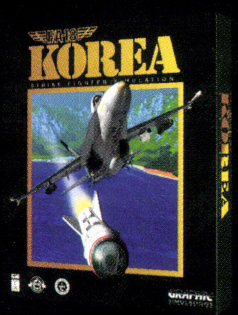
- Native 3Dfx® texture mapping and effects
- Powerful mission creator/editor
- Highly realistic carrier operations
- Detailed printed and online documentation
- Extensive theater of ops with beautiful rolling terrain
- Authentic avionics and flight modeling
- Network play over LAN or Internet
- Huge arsenal, including B-57 tactical nuke!
- Virtual cockpit with multiple padlocking options
- Multiple wingman commands

Windows '95/NT 4.0 & PowerMac
3Dfx® graphics require 3Dfx-based graphics accelerator.



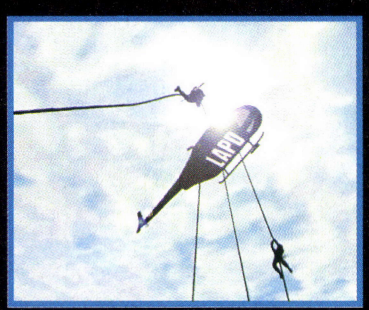
GRAPHIC
SIMULATIONS
CORPORATION

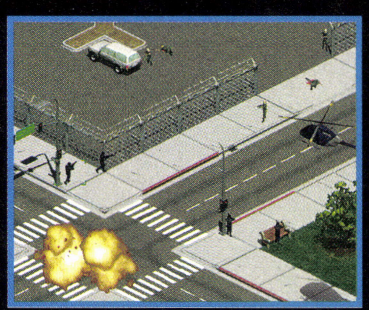
IF GUNS FAIL, BRING IN DOGS.

IF DOGS FAIL, BRING IN TEAR GAS.

IF TEAR GAS FAILS,

BRING IN HELICOPTERS.





SIERRA®

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DARYL F. GATES' POLICE QUEST SWAT 2

Welcome to the world of Daryl F. Gates and the LAPD. Here, a thin blue line separates law-abiding society from kooks, crazies, terrorists, sociopaths, drug lords and gang bangers. The choice is yours. Join the good guys and learn LAPD SWAT tactics, strategies and scenarios. Or become one of society's miscreants, and take it to the establishment with bombs, grenades, and rocket launchers. Alone or on-line, no two missions are alike. All you have is your mental wherewithal and a steely resolve to keep your drawers soil-free under fire. It's not just another day in L.A. Then again, it is.

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

IF HELICOPTERS FAIL,

BRING IN THE NEGOTIATION TEAM.

For games we've rated as an A or A-, admittance to the Best of the A-List is the ultimate honor; if it's on this list, it's not just great, it *rocks*. Serious gamers will want all of these titles in their collections.

Civilization II	(June '96)	MicroProse
Comanche 3	(July/Aug '97)	NovaLogic
Command & Conquer: Red Alert	(Feb '97)	Westwood Studios
Daggerfall	(Nov '96)	Bethesda Softworks
Diablo	(Feb '97)	Blizzard Entertainment
Duke Nukem 3D	(July '96)	GT Interactive
Dungeon Keeper	(Sept '97)	Electronic Arts
FPS: Baseball Pro '98	(Sept '97)	Sierra On-Line
Links LS '98	(Oct '97)	Access Software
Lords of the Realm II	(March '97)	Sierra On-Line
Master of Orion II	(March '97)	MicroProse
MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries	(Dec '96)	Activision
MDK	(May/June '97)	Playmates Interactive
NHL 98	(Nov '97)	Electronic Arts
Pro Pinball: Timeshock!	(Sept '97)	Empire Interactive
Starfleet Academy	(Nov '97)	Interplay
Quake	(Oct '96)	GT Interactive
Twinsen's Odyssey	(Sept '97)	Activision
X-COM: Apocalypse	(Oct '97)	MicroProse
X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter	(July/Aug '97)	LucasArts

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

Yes, the *PC Games* editors play tons of games, but there are some we've stuck with beyond the call of duty. Here are the five games we've been playing the most over the past month.

1. Jedi Knight →
2. Hexen II
3. NHL 98
4. Need for Speed II: SE
5. Dark Reign

HOW WE RATE GAMES

Here at *PC Games* we use a letter-grade system to rate games. Everyone knows what our grades mean without needing an in-depth explanation or clever chart: an A+ is the best score possible and an F is a complete bust. To give you a better feel for the overall quality of a title, we rate each game in six key areas. We also select a Game of the Month for each issue. We review games when and only when the makers say they're ready for review.

GAME of the MONTH: The *PC Games* Game of the Month is the one title among the month's releases that stands out from the rest. While it's generally the best overall game of the month, a game will occasionally warrant this honor not because it's the highest-rated game in the issue, but because it's a standout in one or more areas.

GAMEPLAY: In a nutshell, how much fun is it to play? This takes into account the quality of the game's interface and control scheme.

GETTING STARTED: How much reading, studying, and hardware-tweaking are required before you can start to have fun? (The less the better.)

GRAPHICS: How advanced and attractive are the game's visual elements, and how well do they serve the game?

SOUND CHECK: How good are the game's sound effects and musical score, and how well do they serve the game?

OVERALL GRADE: Taking everything into account, how strongly do we recommend the game for purchase?

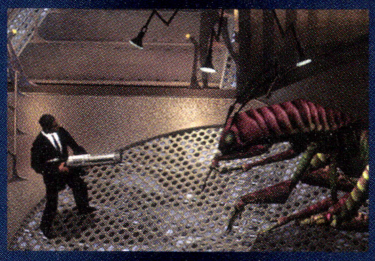
MULTIPLAYER: How much value will you get from the game's multiplayer element, if there is one? (N/A = not available) This independent rating takes into account ease of multiplayer setup.

SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO BUST SOME HEADS TO KEEP THE ALIENS IN LINE

MIB
MEN IN BLACK™
THE GAME

Three new MiB missions – from the Arctic to the Amazon.

Select the MiB agent you want to be.



Fast-paced action shooter with challenging puzzles.

Battle aliens in 200 unique settings.

YOU KNOW HOW THE MOVIE ENDS.
THE GAME IS UP TO YOU.

developed by:

GIGAWATT

WIN 95
CD-ROM

TEEN
AGES 13+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

for a free demo visit
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The New

PANZER GENERAL® II. More than a sequel. An entire generation beyond anything yet seen in strategy games. And seeing *is* believing. Witness the LIVING BATTLEFIELD,™ a new standard for strategy game artwork. Featuring the heightened realism of hand-rendered maps — thirty painstakingly crafted battlefields that are faithful to the real ones of WWII — the LIVING BATTLEFIELD also showcases detailed 3D-rendered combat units with six facings.

Of course, this beauty is beyond skin deep. The phenomenal game play of the second generation PANZER GENERAL game engine is truly

THE LIVING BATTLEFIELD SERIES features the enhanced realism of hand-crafted maps and photo-realistic 3D-rendered combat units.

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www.panzergeneral.com

Face of Strategy Gaming.

awesome. Battles rage through WWII's Eastern and Western Fronts, North Africa, even the continental USA. Play one large campaign and three mini-campaigns — some of which are playable as either Axis *or* Allied forces. Edit scenario and unit data with the powerful Battle Editor for enhanced gameplay and extended replay. And with full multiplayer support, battles can include up to four players.

PANZER GENERAL II.

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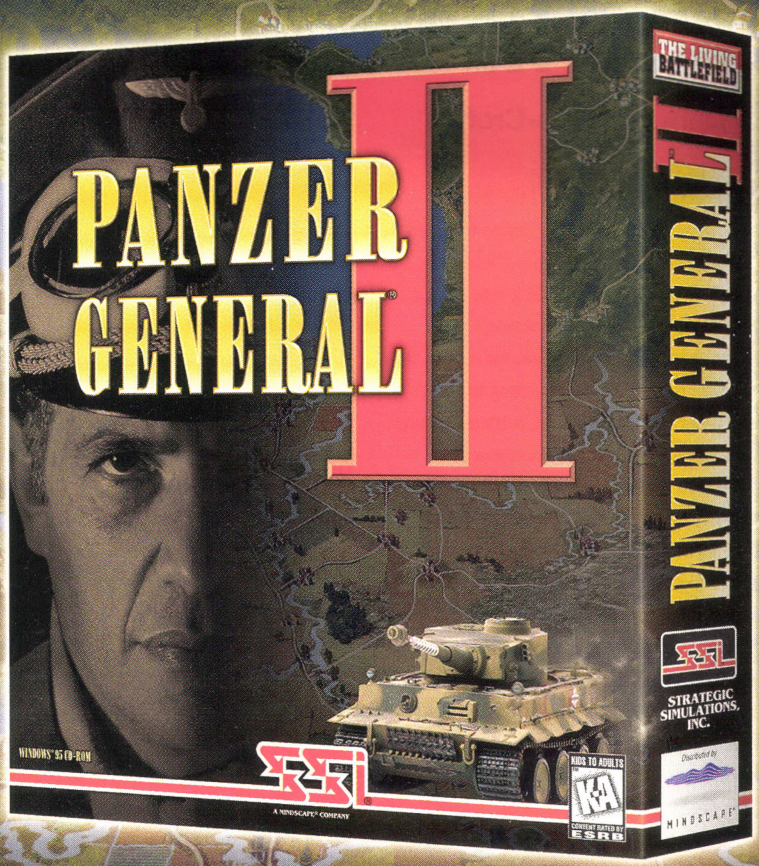

WINDOWS® 95 CD-ROM

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KIDS TO ADULTS K-A CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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SNEAK PEEK

Tomb Raider 2

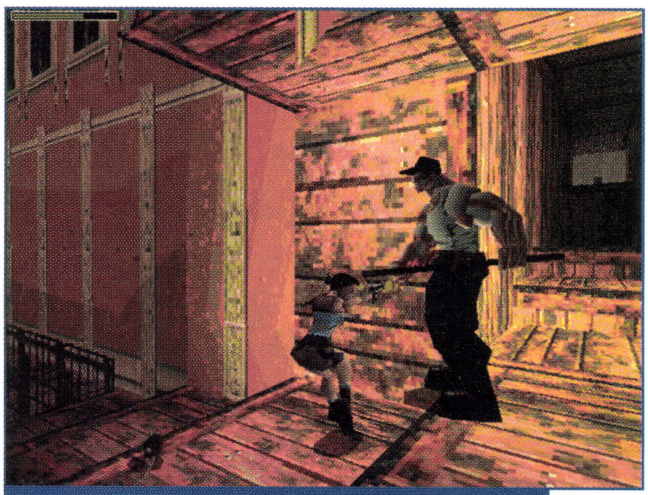
By Daniel Morris-Croft

PC Games recently raided the tomb of English developer Core Design to get an early look at Tomb Raider 2 in action. Since then, we've been spending time with a playable alpha of one of the season's most hotly anticipated sequels. What we've seen so far is very promising, and listening to Core's ideas about expanding Lara Croft's adventures has us hopping for the game's release.

We gave Tomb Raider a B+ last year. Okay? You wouldn't believe the flak we got for it, either, with some readers giving us horrified, disbelieving stares—"No A?" Nope. B+, because as brilliant as the engine was, as dynamic as Lara Croft's control scheme was, as innovative as the tombs and puzzles were, there was one small problem: About four levels into the game, we started to get a little bored. We started to wish there were more things to shoot—just to *do*. So did you. After the T-rex attack early on, there were few real jolting surprises left.

Violent Femme

Smooth as silk, leaving broken bodies and broken hearts in her wake.



He may be bigger, but you're the one with the gats.

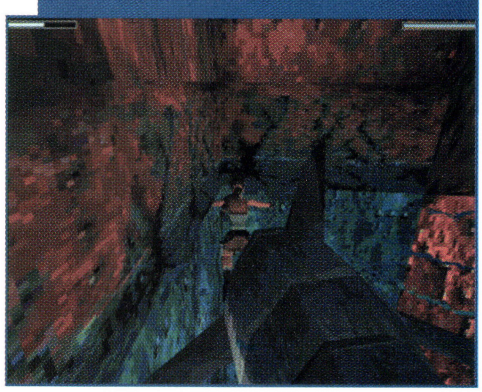
Core has taken pains to ensure that interest in the sequel doesn't flag for an instant. There's a much heavier combat element now, with a multitude of bipedal baddies (which is to say, human) in need of dispatching. According to Troy Horton, TR2's producer, this wasn't a simple change. "Animals are pretty dumb," he comments, "so we could get away with a more limited AI. We can't do that with humans, so this took a major rewrite of the AI code."

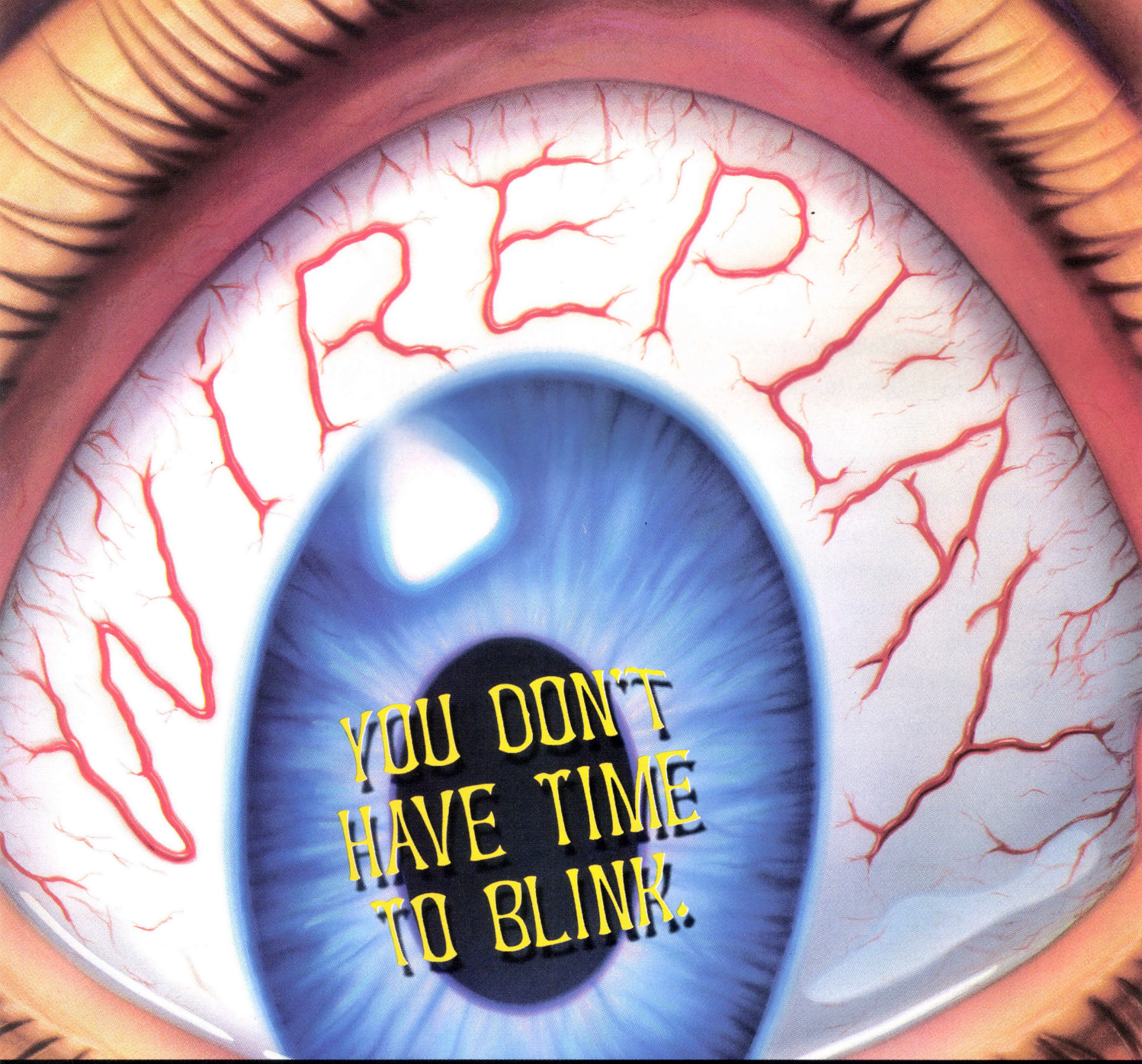
Which is not to say that this isn't still everyone's beloved Tomb Raider. The levels are, if anything, even bigger and more convoluted, including outside areas. Making your way through them is going to be hard work, demanding tenacity, creativity, and an awful lot of grunting on the part of Ms. Croft—just the way you like it.

Now that they've got a bona fide phenomenon on their hands, Eidos is pushing Tomb Raider 2 the way few games get pushed. Lara Croft was named one of the 50 Most Influential People in Cyberspace in a recent issue of *Time Digital*. She's on TV in 3D-modeled spots for TR2, on the radio, and her arrogant mug pouts from every other page of every computer-gaming pub in the world. Anyone who needs further proof that we've entered the Age of Croft need only avail themselves of the notorious Nude Raider galleries to see that Lara has many *devoted* admirers. Ahem.

Tomb Raider 2 sends Lara in search of the Dagger of Xian. This magical artifact is in hot demand, because whoever plunges the dagger into their own heart will inherit the power of a mystical ancient dragon—and that's a dagger Lara's just

Umm, Lara...check six. Get outta the water!





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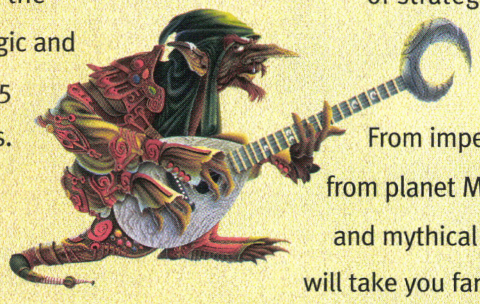

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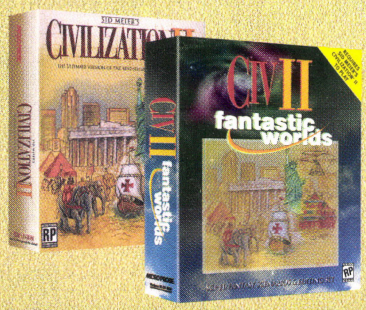

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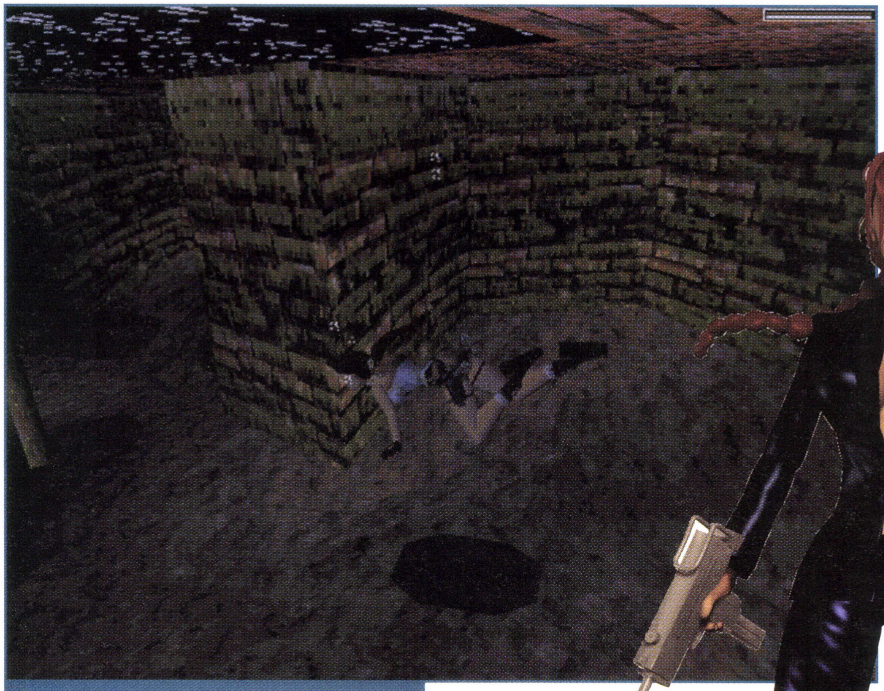


Penetrate a gangster's hideout by crossing his moat—the hard way.

gotta have. As Horton points out, "The storyline is much more important for a sequel. In the original, people were blown away by the whole look and style. Tomb 2 won't have this same initial reaction, so it needs a more compelling backstory to propel players through all the levels."

Lara's quest takes her to such locales as China, where she'll plumb the treacherous Great Wall of China; to Venice, for a canal-crossing shootout with a gang of international crooks; to an underwater wreck, where she has to sidestep man-eating (well, woman-eating) sharks; and into the catacombs of a grim cult safeguarding the dagger.

"'More stuff to fight' was a definite demand from the feedback we got to the first game," Horton says. "So we were able to work with a weapon that could be used underwater, and that allowed us to add sharks and eels, which are really cool."

Tomb 2 also adds a number of Pitfall/Indiana Jones–style elements to the mix. There are swinging crates to jump onto, steely-blade swipes to duck under, and darts to dodge. It's not only the action quotient that's been upped, but the adventure excitement, too.

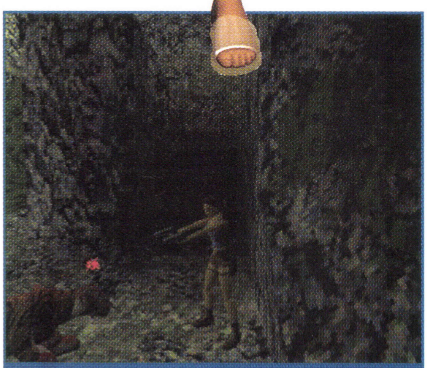
The Tomb Raider engine is more or less intact, enhanced by new animations adding to the already breathtaking repertoire of Lara's actions. At one precarious point, she must climb a slippery wall of handholds, and the swinging and straining moves are as lifelike as any action any polygonal hero has ever demonstrated.

Most of the noticeable differences are of the superficial variety—beautifully rendered environments and objects that will best take advantage of the 3Dfx support. Dynamic lighting adds a whole new depth, making underwater sequences doubly haunting.

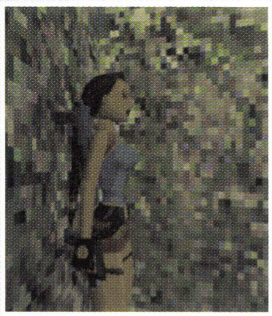
Speaking of superficial face-lifts, Lara herself gets Vogued over for this sequel. She's visibly softer, curvier, sexier—if you can believe it—and now has the ponytail that was dropped from the original. Sprucing up the cheesecake factor will be Lara's appearance in a body-fitting wetsuit for the underwater envir onments (though, to be fair, she'll be bundled up for the Tibetan snow).

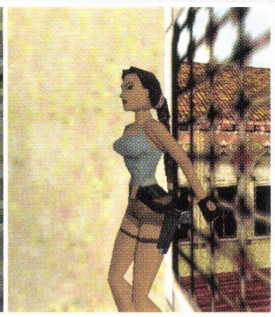
And the coolest addition? "That's definitely the vehicles," Horton confesses. Vehicles? "Yes, we've added a couple of vehicles so Lara can jump into the driver's seat," he adds, as he maneuvers Lara into a concealed area and nimbly leaps her aboard a small speedboat. "It's not just that they're a cool addition," he says, "but they feel right and play right, which makes a huge difference to the gameplay."

Same gal, same attitude—plus lots more killing and a few surprising new tricks. As Eidos revs its hype machine into full stride, it's hard to fault the company for its confidence. Tomb Raider 2 is shaping up to be one of the most exciting releases of the holiday season—and promising to be better than just more of the same.



A Bengal tiger sure will wake you up in a hurry.



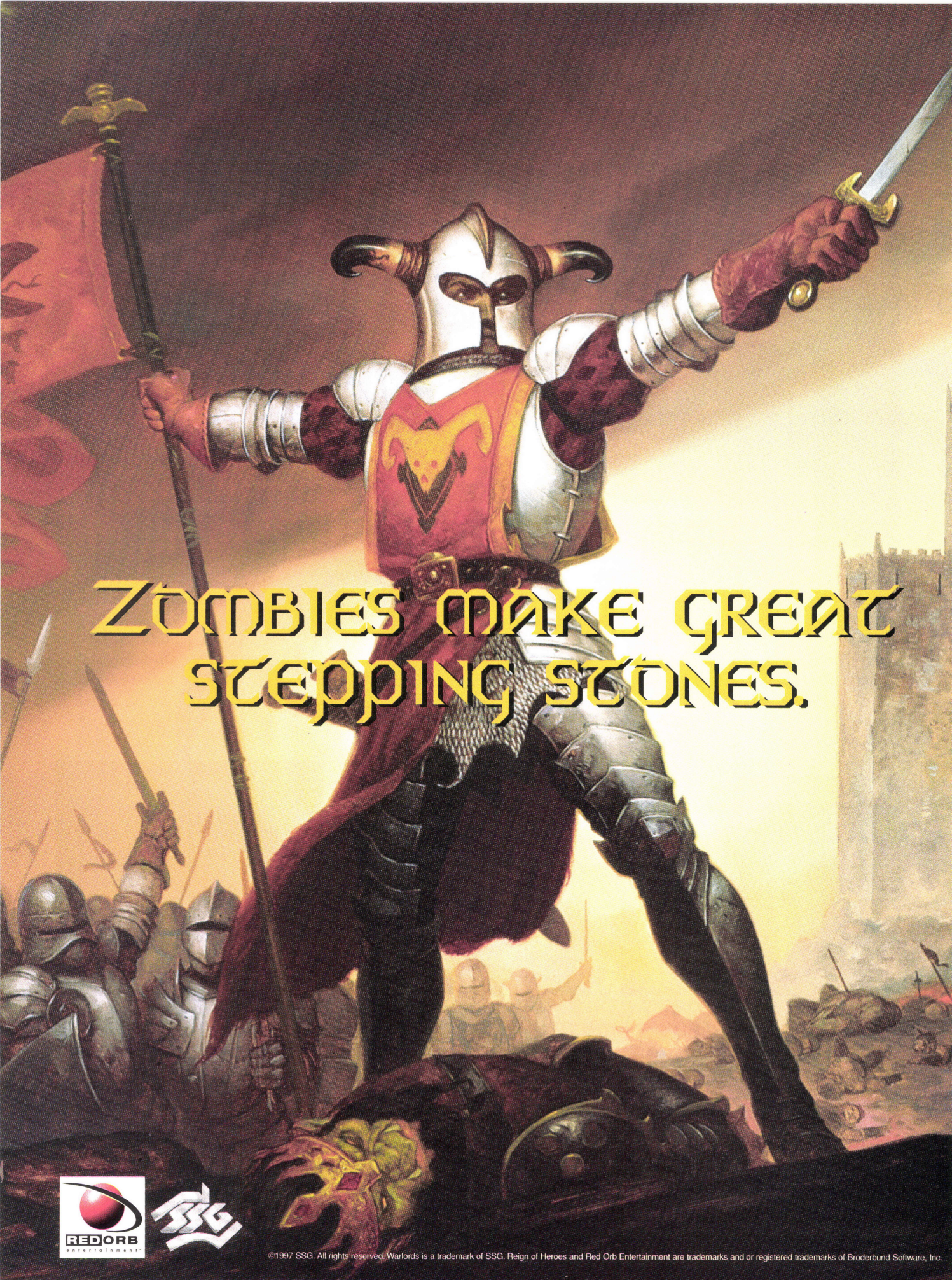


LOOKING GOOD, LOOKING BETTER

As with the original, TR2 is really supposed to be played under the power of 3Dfx. Just look at the difference. C'mon, which would you rather control?

TOMB RAIDER 2

DEVELOPER:	Core Design
PUBLISHER:	Eidos Interactive
WEB:	www.eidosinteractive.com
AVAILABLE:	November 1997



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GAME OF THE MONTH

Jedi Knight:

Scene: Dark chamber in the heart of the sacred Jedi burial ground. The last Dark Jedi standing in the way of Kyle's absolute power lies dead at his feet. The only light in the room comes from Kyle's lightsaber, which hums softly in the background.

Invigorated by the greatness of the Light Side, Kyle's fitting silence pays respect to the father he has just avenged. The Light Side was the only true way to go. To follow the Dark Side would be to reject the memory of his father. Kyle steps back and braces himself for the exhilaration of the power of a thousand great Jedi Knights. Now, nothing can stop the Light Side from preserving universal peace…

By Rob "Light Kyle" Smith

This is the only conceivable outcome any respectable Jedi-in-training can imagine for the future prosperity of the galaxy. To embrace the Dark Side means to be weak-willed and power-hungry, without thought or consideration for the greater good. To follow the Dark path is simply not an option.

In Jedi Knight, the road to a final confrontation with Dark Jedi Jerec takes place over some of the most impressively constructed levels ever. From the scale of the gargantuan space stations to the claustrophobia of a Tusken Raider–infested house, through a city attempting to go about its daily routine while being harangued by Garcs and Raiders, to the sprawling irrigation systems and onward into space, Jedi Knight is epic in every conceivable sense.

Interspersed with well-acted, well-written, and well-directed video cut-scenes, the story progresses along a varied and challenging route that really captures the *Star Wars* space opera. More than the weapons, the Light Force powers are your true friend. Force Healing, Persuasion (invisibility), Blinding, and Protection need nurturing. In ammo-sparse, enemy-infested levels, why kill everyone when many can be "Persuaded" to let you by?

As it should be, agents of the Dark Side get their dues.

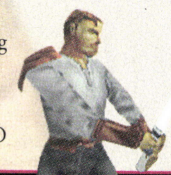
Light Side: The only true way

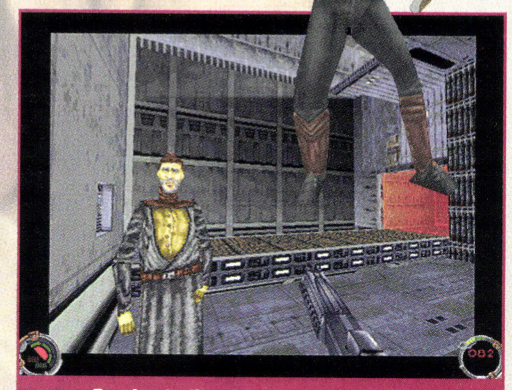
To help out, the citizens and workers in these cities and space stations can be a vital source of information. Okay, most of them simply want to keep their heads down and stay alive, but there are rewards to be had should you save aggravated innocents from the close attention of Raiders. And there's nothing more fulfilling than taking out muggers.

Spurring on that fight to the Light Side is John Williams' brilliant soundtrack. Timed to burst into life at key moments, with the backing of sound effects for blasters, shouts, and lightsabers straight out of the movies, Jedi Knight is the total *Star Wars* experience.

In multiplayer, there are nine Jedi ranks to select from, each offering a different number of stars to attribute to your chosen Force powers. (Stars are also awarded in single-play for finding most or all of the secrets in a level and displaying saber proficiency.) Two of the six well-constructed Jedi Training (read: deathmatch) levels allow the lightsaber only, requiring deft use of the Force powers. Loads of skins, including those for all the main Jedi characters in the game, the Rodians, and so on, add to the look of these eight-player combats. The tactical and setup options are virtually limitless, which is going to lead to some frenzied combat on the Zone. LucasArts has also supplied Three Capture-the-Flag–specific levels (including one sprawling cityscape).

If you needed a reason to invest in some 3D hardware, this is it. While 640-by-480 SVGA is palatable, it's shocking to think that a $50 game could be worth the extra hardware investment to run it at its finest. But if this isn't the game to do it, there is none.





Be nice to the citizens; they will help, and you'll be en route to the Light Side.

So practice those Light powers, young Jedi, for they will stand you in good stead for the long battle ahead. Look into your heart; you know the true path.

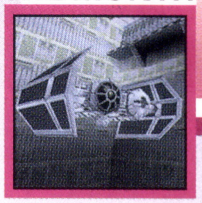
Yes, this is an actual gameplay screen from a deathmatch.

JEDI KNIGHT

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	A+
OVERALL	A
MULTIPLAYER:	A-

Yes, oh yes—as utterly absorbing as we'd all hoped.

GAME OF THE MONTH



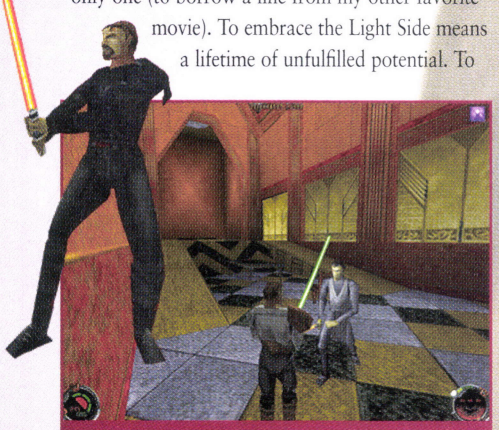
Dark Forces II

Scene: Dark chamber in the heart of the sacred Jedi burial ground. The last Dark Jedi standing in the way of Kyle's absolute power lies dead at his feet. The only light in the room comes from Kyle's lightsaber, which hums softly in the background.

Infused with the power of the Dark Side, Kyle's mirthful laugh echoes throughout the chamber, rejecting everything his dead father stood and died for. Choice? There was no choice to make: The Light Side of the Force is weak. To choose to follow it is to be weak. Kyle steps back and braces himself for the ecstasy about to course through his veins—the power of thousands of dead Jedi Knights. Nothing can stop him now...

By Steve "Dark Kyle" Klett

This is but one of two possible outcomes of the much-anticipated follow-up to Dark Forces. For this gamer, it's the only acceptable outcome. When it comes to dealing with the Force and other Jedi, there can be only one (to borrow a line from my other favorite movie). To embrace the Light Side means a lifetime of unfulfilled potential. To share the superior power of the Dark Side with another—unthinkable.



The first Dark Jedi you face is Yun. He's not so tough—just keep moving.

Jerec, the most powerful of the seven remaining Dark Jedi when the game begins, means to seize the power of the Dark Side for himself—fueled with all the might of Jedi long dead and buried. Your father, a Light Jedi murdered by one of Jerec's minions, died protecting the sacred Jedi burial ground from the forces of "evil." He may have been naïve in his ideals, but his goal—to stop Jerec at all costs—was admirable.

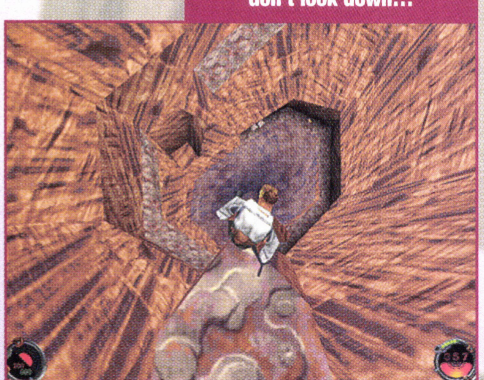
You, as Kyle Katarn, must learn the ways of the Force, avenge your father's death, find the hidden Jedi burial ground before Jerec does, and seize the power of the universe: It is your destiny. Don't let anything or anyone stand in your way, and don't succumb to the Light Side of the Force if you hope to emerge victorious.

Your epic quest will take you through 21 cavernous levels of a size and scope you've never before encountered in an action game. But don't despair. You will learn and master Force powers as you go that will make your task easier: Force Jump, Force Speed, Force Pull, and Force Seeing. These are available to all Jedi, and they're the first skills you must master.

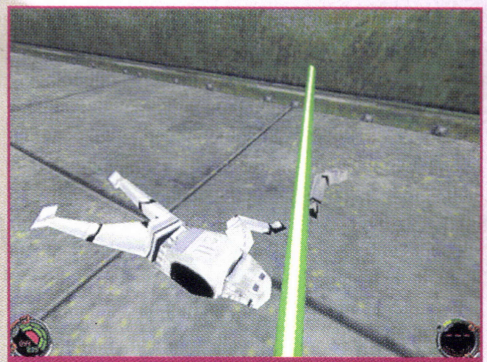
Don't concern yourself with protecting innocents you encounter while chasing Jerec; there are no true innocents in the universe, only obstacles that must be struck down if you are to follow your destiny. Destroy any and all in your way without hesitation or remorse, and you'll be rewarded, late in the game, with the power of the Dark Side. Force Throw, Grip, Lightning Bolts, and Destruction—all will be yours. You can't help but scoff at the paltry Light Force powers.

It'll take some time to master the art of dueling with your lightsaber, but be patient. You have six Dark Jedi to use as fodder before you must face Jerec—and there's always those "innocents" to practice on as well. You also have 10 other weapons to battle with, including the Imperial Repeater Rifle, Bowcaster, Rail Detonator, and Concussion Rifle. Each has its time and place, but you'll want to focus your energies on the lightsaber, which, of course, is the only weapon that can kill another Jedi. Use it early and often, and you will be rewarded with better dueling skills and Force power.

The levels are vast and full of vertigo-inspiring scenes—don't look down...



Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II is the gaming moment you've been waiting for. No other first-person shooter can match it for style, drama, story, character, and edge-of-your-seat entertainment.



A stormtrooper loses an arm. Oh well, can't make his aim any worse!

Light Side? Give me a break...

The *Star Wars* universe has never been this amazing on the PC. Reach forth and seize your destiny: Embrace the Dark Side of the Force!

JEDI KNIGHT: DARK FORCES II

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	A+
OVERALL	A
MULTIPLAYER:	B+

Totally worth the wait.

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STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ Your Force Powers will diminish with use, so use them wisely. And always be on the lookout for Force Energy Boosts (the levels are riddled with secrets holding caches of goodies). ▼ Switch to third-person and enable Always Run during saber duels with the bosses. I did find it easier to beat Pic in first-person, however, as he's so damn short. ▼ Most of the bosses can be defeated by running at them and then stepping to one side as you slash them, or by jumping over them and spinning, striking, and jumping away quickly. Standing still is death.

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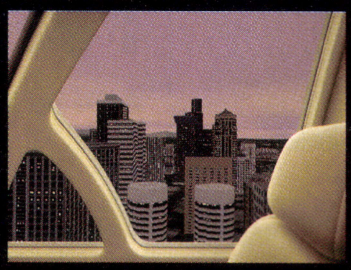

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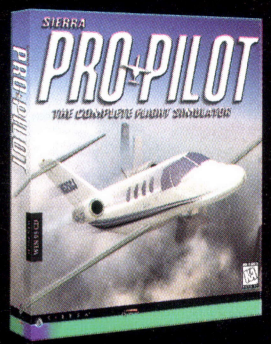

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Postal

By Daniel Morris

It's a rare computer game that makes the lead story on CNN's *Headline News*, or warrants space in the austere pages of *The Wall Street Journal*, or prompts an angry written response from the senior official of the government's largest agency.

But Postal can claim all three, and its developers are quick to boast about the attention. Its advertisements, which depict a small Arizona town in the media aftermath of a massacre, tout Postal as the game "every gamer wanted but no one else dared to make." Its over-the-top violence level attracted national media interest and even spurred Marvin Runyon, the Postmaster General of the United States, to write to the designers, urging them to abandon the game.

Detailed background art lets you rampage through a ramshackle junkyard.

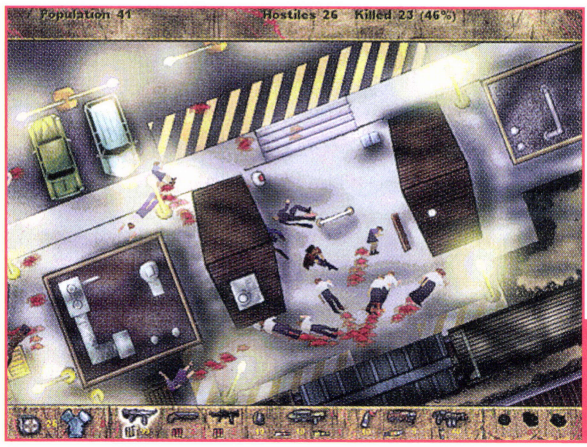
So what's the story?

In a nutshell, Postal is the most violent, antisocial, psychotic, bloody, murderous computer game ever devised. I don't say this lightly: I've played many a violent computer game. I've lain waste to every segment of civilization in more action games than I can remember. There is much virtual blood on my hands.

Molotov cocktails incinerate hapless members of a marching band during a downtown parade.

But Postal trumps them all. There's no plot at all. You walk out of your house one day with a gun in your hand and start killing people. Cops and others try to kill you back, and you try to kill them, and you also kill many innocent bystanders. You kill a vast percentage of the hostiles on a given map, and then you move to the next map and lay waste to it. That's the game.

We have a running office pool on who will be the first editor to finally flip and go on a massive shooting spree, picking coworkers off with glee. Postal brings us just one step closer to finding out.



As fast as these unarmed commuters can file off the train, you can mow them down.

Many people won't be able to get past its horrific elements. To wit: Wounded bystanders crawling and leaving a blood trail behind them, their agonized wails of "I can't breathe," "I can't see anything," or "Kill me now" filling the air until you stand over them and calmly execute them with a shot to the head. This kind of thing really has no precedent in PC gaming.

The game is played from a three-quarter isometric perspective (occasionally employing a top-down angle for variety), with 3D characters moving against a 2D painted background. The backgrounds are spectacular, with excellent art and plenty of (nondestructible) detail to absorb. Postal requires some smarts to get through successfully, because running around in a kill-crazy rampage will not be conducive to your survival. Using cover, hiding behind walls and vehicles, moving through narrow, safe passages, and avoiding open spaces—all of these tactics are needed to get through the levels safe and sound.

The AI is generally impressive, too. Characters are dropped onto the background and assigned a personality, whether aggressive, passive, bold, shell-shocked, whatever. In a game editor, they're assigned "buoys" that create a pattern of potential movements on the screen. When cross-indexed with personality type, these can lead to some very realistic actions and movements during the mayhem.

Weapons include a rifle, a shotgun, grenades, Molotov cocktails, a rocket launcher, and more. The action is always hectic, with up to 50 characters being tracked on a map at once. As you plow your way through the different locations around the fictional town of Paradise, Arizona, you'll be able to appreciate clever detail work like holes in fences through which you can snipe (perfect for multiplayer), the ability to bounce grenades around corners, and flammable gas tanks or barrels that can be used as tinder for a well-placed firebomb.

Does Postal Go Too Far?

Just harmless fun?
Our own Amy Crigger doesn't think so...

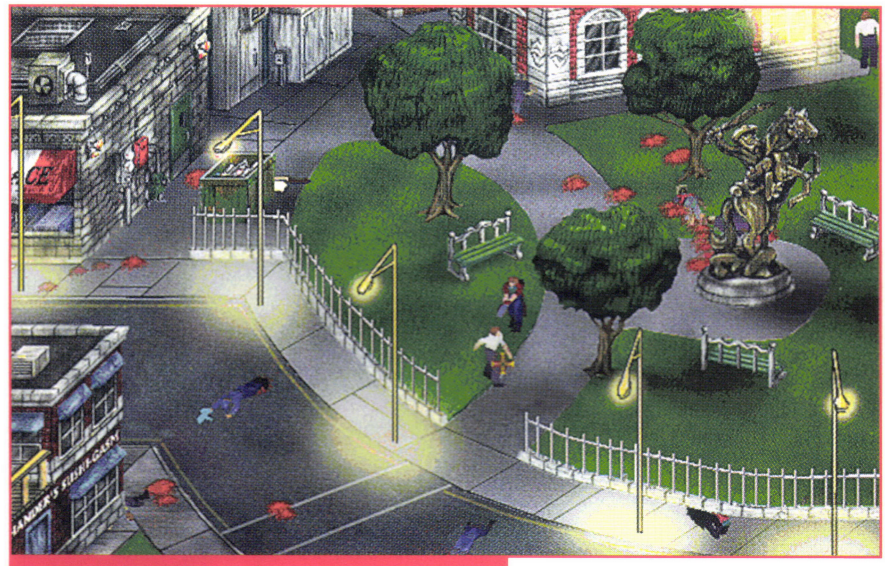
"I will don the eviscerated organs of my enemies as party hats, wear their shredded entrails as neckties, and oh, how I shall dance." This is the diary entry that opens a Postal level.

Postal is like a collage mixing the gore of a few Nine Inch Nails videos, the psychology of *Silence of the Lambs*, the ideology of Carmageddon, and the play of Syndicate Wars. The developers say it's the game that everyone wanted but no one would make. Gee, I wonder why? Maybe it's disturbing for sane, stable people to play a game that has no plot except to run around and kill the entire population on a map. Or maybe

it's because you wound innocent people and listen to their screaming pleas for help. Then you hear the voice in your character's head nagging through the speakers, "Don't be a sissy," until you can't take it anymore and hit the execution command, which makes your character shoot his victims in the back of the head.

The first time I sat down to see Postal, I lasted about 10 minutes before I had to leave the room with a sick feeling in my stomach. I've never felt this way about a game before—and I *like* action games.

I understand that people wouldn't normally "act out atrocities that [they] would otherwise never indulge in," as Running With Scissors' Web site (**www.gopostal.com**) claims. But, like many, I believe that one of the reasons already unstable people go over the edge is because something like this pushes them. Sure, I'll be the first to admit that a videogame sounds unlikely to do that, but as one beta-tester offered, "I want to get me some of them guns...." Should games be encouraging people like this? Postal is morally disgusting. —*AC*



Just a Sunday walk in the park for the town psycho.

Some interesting sound design keeps play moving: Ambient sounds fade and grow louder according to their proximity, and new user-generated sounds can be added with a sound editor. So dip into those *Beavis and Butt-head* tapes.

Leaving aside for a moment the issue of the game's relentless brutality, Postal suffers mainly from thinness—namely, there isn't a whole lot to do from level

Executing a wounded civilian. How neighborly.

to level besides waste people. Each level has a unique set piece, like the slaughter of a marching band, mowing down commuters filing off a train, or (in the game's most barbaric moment) massacring kids in a schoolyard. But level after level of this can get awfully repetitive, and the orgy of murder can become—it's frightening to say—a bit ho-hum.

Postal also ships with a level editor that allows you to place characters on one of the game's 17 prepainted backgrounds, then designate their personalities and AI. While this is certainly a welcome feature, it isn't ultimately very interesting without being able to alter the backgrounds or buildings. A better term for this feature would be "bad-guy editor."

Multiplayer mode lets you take on up to 15 other players on the same isometric maps, and while the novelty of combat from this unusual perspective may be preoccupying for a while, Postal's general lack of depth has kept it from being a hot disc-spinner in the office.

But there's no denying the immediate glee to be had in first installing and playing this ferocious game. A certain class of gamer (you sickos know who you are) will find Postal antisocial, psychotic, and completely irresistible.

POSTAL

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	**B-**
MULTIPLAYER:	B-

Vicious and hyperviolent, but fun if you have the stomach for it.

DEVELOPER:	Running With Scissors
PUBLISHER:	Ripcord Games 888-797-5867
WEB:	www.gopostal.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 64MB HD, 256-color SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ You can angle grenades around corners and off walls. This is especially useful in the caves, where you can send pinballing grenades ahead of you to clear bad guys out of the next bend. ▼ Sow confusion. By popping several Molotov cocktails around you, you can create a barrier of flame between you and pursuers. Listen for the telltale "Where is he?" that indicates you're not being tracked. Now you're free to slink to a new killing ground. ▼ A great way to defeat tough RPG-equipped enemies: Take a position behind a car or structure and then expose yourself just long enough to take a shot or two at the enemy. As his RPG streaks toward you, backstep and sidestep to resume your covered position. The incoming round explodes harmlessly. Repeat until the RPG man is deceased.

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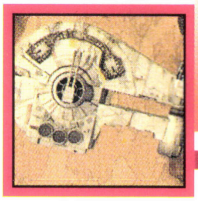


Shadows of the Empire

By George T. Chronis

It's something of a shame that Shadows of the Empire is hitting the PC only slightly before Jedi Knight. Likely, most action gamers will be saving their credits to purchase the sequel to Dark Forces, not this console conversion. Too bad, because there's a lot to like about playing Shadows. The *Star Wars* look, the music—it's all here.

As you're probably aware, Shadows of the Empire started off life as an "exclusive" Nintendo 64 game early this year. Back then, LucasArts took a bit of heat over the game design—switching from arcade shoot-'em-up levels to first-person action levels and back. Some felt that Shadows couldn't figure out what kind of game it wanted to be. Yet, following the same pattern didn't seem to hurt Rebel Assault any, and neither does it hurt Shadows of the Empire in this 3D accelerated–only port.

For the sake of comparison, I yanked my N64 game cartridge out of the closet and played it concurrently with the PC version. Both are solo play only, and the levels and gameplay are essentially the same. Since many of its levels are railed, Shadows isn't a complete 3D environment. LucasArts has made some general enhancements and gameplay refinements to this PC version, however.

The most obvious change is that the stationary N64 cut-cards between levels have been replaced by newly animated cut-scenes that are quite attractive and add continuity to the gameplay. Fog effects have been dialed back, revealing added level detail and making it easier to pinpoint probe droids and Imperial troopers in the distance. Lifting the fog on the junkyard level now makes it possible to see all the different kinds of equipment and ships strewn about in amazing detail. Keyboard, joystick, and mouse support simply make it much easier to navigate tricky rock emplacements and narrow catwalks.

Better on the PC

On the downside, lessening the fog on some levels makes them garishly straight and hard-edged. Rock emplacements and ice walls designed to compensate for fog effects and fuzzier TV screens now look almost under-rendered.

Take that, Katarn! I can fly!

Bad guys lurk on every platform.

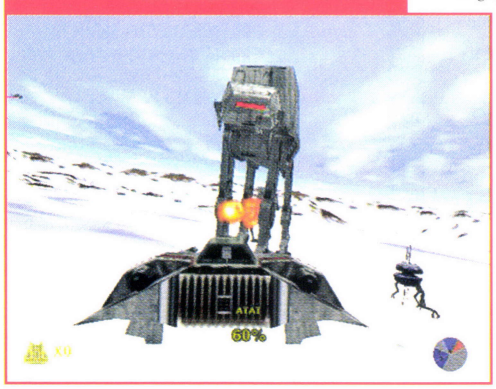
Also, while movement within levels has been enhanced by PC input devices, precise aiming is actually less accurate compared with using the mini-joystick on the N64 gamepad.

On its own merits, Shadows of the Empire is a fun game to play. Although not nearly as compelling an adventure as Jedi Knight, this post–*Empire Strikes Back* side story of an underworld organization plotting to use the captured Han Solo to deal Darth Vader out of the picture *is* engaging. While Dash Rendar is yet another Han Solo clone, he makes a cavalier hero—one more attractively rendered onscreen than Kyle Katarn is in Jedi Knight. Also, the jet-pack is a great option that adds a lot to the gameplay.

Where Shadows comes up short is in the twitch category. It's simply difficult to control Dash effectively to deal with adversaries like IG-88 and Boba Fett. Another problem is that there's no save-game option between levels, so when you get zapped, it's back to ground zero again. It's damn frustrating to snake through an extremely long level, only to get killed at the end because you couldn't get the blaster aimed on target. These are issues from the N64 edition that could've been addressed.

But if you're a *Star Wars* fan, there's too much good stuff here not to pick up a copy. If you're not into the whole phenomenon, or multiplayer options are a necessity, Shadows will be much less compelling.

The battle for Hoth is still the most memorable level.



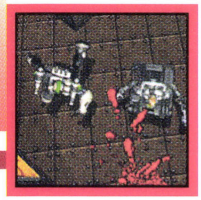
SHADOWS OF THE EMPIRE

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS :	A
SOUND CHECK:	A
OVERALL	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

No Force, no lightsabers, no multiplay, but it's a good time.

PUBLISHER:	LucasArts 800-985-8227
WEB:	www.lucasarts.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 3D accelerator card, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P150, 24MB RAM, 32-bit sound card
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ When it comes time to leap, make sure you're completely aligned with your target. ▼ The best way to take out IG-88 is to get to the corner of the upper deck near the challenge point. That way, he can come at you from only one direction. ▼ Let the auto-aim on your blaster get the range to a target, then press your aim button to lock on. ▼ After you get the jet-pack, use it instead of jumping to get around, and for getting to out-of-the-way platforms.



Take No Prisoners

Two's company, three's a frag

By Don St. John

You may wonder what the point of an overhead, omniscient view is if you don't get godlike powers with it. Well, that's how it goes with Take No Prisoners: you're there hovering over the action, all right, but that's somehow not keeping all manner of psychos, mutants, and other baddies from trying to work you over.

Take No Prisoners offers the unique perspective of third-person overhead. Imagine the Crusader: No Remorse/Regret games with the three-quarter perspective shifted up. Better still, remember Gauntlet?

"Overhead," you may enquire? It only takes a little while to get used to the perspective, and you'll have a good measure of control over things right away. Since much of your information gets downloaded to a Personal Data Device screen you check occasionally, it's not as if you're missing anything. You just have to dodge the enemy, and that's simple enough.

Brøderbund's first shooter under the new Red Orb imprint serves up a fairly standard post-apocalyptic scenario: You're schlepped by some mysterioso corporate outfit into San Antonio, where you're charged with breaking into several places (a prison, a corporate intelligence center, downtown offices). Your aim: Download data like security codes, maps, personal log files, and so on, while dodging the assorted scum and crazies who populate the city. Plus you've got to find a special crystal that'll let you build a dome to shield you from the degraded environment.

Graphically, TNP's violent encounters sport a cartoony look—the splotchy gurgle of blood running out of dead guys gets monotonous after awhile. Moreover, any 3D feel is limited to the tiers of the environments, although it improves a great deal when you use any Direct3D accelerator card (a must for this game, in our opinion).

In single-play, TNP is fairly run-of-the-mill as shooter technique goes. You pick up weapons and other utilities, duck, cover, and strafe, and shoot every dude you run across. The action is fun but not overly compelling: as you slog your way through 20 nonlinear environments ranging from offices to downtown areas and even sewers, there's not much battle variation. The story elements help a lot, though: as you amass information and hit checkpoints, you gain a sense of real adventure and unfolding story. The AI is reasonable when it comes to pursuit, but not so much with face-to-face battle. You should be able to run rings around most of the bad guys you encounter.

Where did all these thugs come from?

Carnage is the only way out.

The sewers of San Antonio could use some cleaning up...and you're just the person for the job.

Ah, but then there's multiplay...and that's where Take No Prisoners finds its true reason for being. It's no amazingly textured Quake or Hexen II, sure, but this game is good proof that you don't have to be in first-person to have a good eight-person fragfest. Much of this is due to the overhead view—its play style is refreshing after so many in-your-face, first-person shooters. It creates the opportunity to sight enemies from above and use the 3D tiers to make your way down for a surprise attack. The intelligently thought-out battles and instant access to the full spread of power-ups and weapons make a real difference to the intricacy of TNP, and to the skill level you have to bring to it. Also, there are several multiplay modes, including a kill-once-with-every-weapon mode, and assassin, team, and CTF styles. Red Orb is making free play available on its own Red Orb Zone as well as on Mplayer. While single-play isn't too bad, online is definitely where you'll have the biggest blast with Take No Prisoners.

TAKE NO PRISONERS

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	C+
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	**B**
MULTIPLAYER:	A-

The unique perspective doesn't push single-play to amazing heights, but the multiplay more than makes up for that.

DEVELOPER:	Raven Software
PUBLISHER:	Red Orb Entertainment 800-548-1798
WEB:	www.redorb.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 35MB HD, DirectX-compatible video card, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 24MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ Fight from above whenever possible. ▼ Don't stint on using health. There are medical stations scattered about, and you usually get a health pickup from anyone you kill. ▼ It's tempting to use the hovercraft at the beginning of the Munitions Center level, but it's actually easier to get your kills on foot. ▼ In the MacArthur Intelligence Center, there are lots of window enclosures. Jump through them whenever possible instead of heading directly up steps.

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ACTION

Hexen II

By George T. Chronis

Mysticism, magic, command of powers elemental and dark...with our modern technological prowess and Judeo-Christian inhibitions, we often forget how completely these things we now ascribe to fantasy have captivated humankind. It's no wonder the Roman legions had the violent mystery cult of Mithras, or that two generations of wannabe Jedi Knights have embraced the Force and *Star Wars*. Nor is it surprising that if there had to be a Doom, Heretic and Hexen had to follow. And now, Hexen II.

The Knights Templar would be proud

The Paladin's sword is a power-slicing-and-dicing wonder, even in SVGA.

Yes, this is SVGA!

Not everyone is going to like Hexen II. Why? Consider Doom. Doom was transfixing to play by yourself. There you were, alone, isolated, watched, and confronted by forces outside your experience. You overcame those forces lurking at every turn by being more than you were expected to be. In the Hexen universe, you are a master, badass warrior or conjurer in your own right. That's a completely different mindset and form of empowerment. If Quake puts you in the role of an anonymous professional soldier born to rule the firefight, Hexen II sets you on an epic quest wherein guile is as important as brawn.

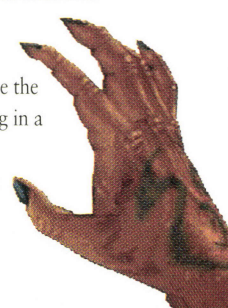
The most striking difference between Hexen II and Heretic/Hexen is in sense of scale and thematic continuity. The setup is nothing new: Dark and sinister forces have descended upon the world, subverting nobleman and commoner alike during the Middle Ages. The world is overrun by Archers, Were-Jaguars, Mummies, flying Imps, and stone Golems—taking orders from some tall red fellow called Eidolon who shows no respect for your power or rightful status. You must travel to four mythical continents and show Eidolon's minions the error of their ignorance.

To help carry out your revenge, Hexen II presents you with a very welcome bounty of four character classes to choose from. There's the Paladin, a warrior of the sword and a nobleman of the first order. For the darker of you out there, the Necromancer is a robed sorcerer who taps into the mystical powers of the ether and projects them as weapons. The Crusader has the power of God at his side; his weapons date back to a time before Jesus when God didn't take crap, and smiting the wicked was the order of the day. Rounding out the classes is the Assassin, the only female character. She is stealthy and lithe—a champion of the underworld, well skilled in dealing swift death from dark corners.

The more kills you attain, the more skill levels are awarded your character. Raise enough levels, and you'll be rewarded with unique special powers. For example, the Necromancer can steal souls of the dead to gain extra health, the Crusader can heal himself, the Assassin can turn invisible, and the Paladin can breathe under water.

As you take your characters into battle, the most striking feature is how beautiful this game is—both in SVGA and GL modes. This isn't necessarily apparent as you slog about in the early Medieval levels, which seem rather ordinary and bland. But as you progress into the Meso-American, Egyptian, and Greco-Roman lands, it's hard not to let your jaw drop.

In all four character classes, gameplay is challenging. Not only are enemies tough to eliminate, but players must master a dizzying number of potions, spells, and artifacts. The best way I found to manage them is to use a three-button mouse and bind the one, three, seven, and nine keys on the numpad to specific uses. In a firefight or a fast-paced deathmatch, having sure and swift access to your inventory will make the difference between victory or lying in a pool of your own blood.



As dazzling as Hexen II is, the gameplay isn't as compelling as

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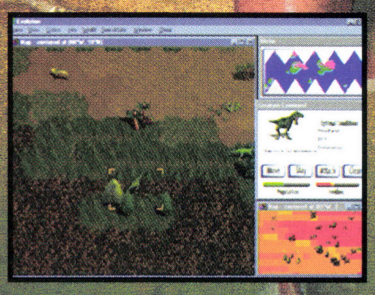

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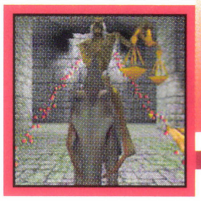
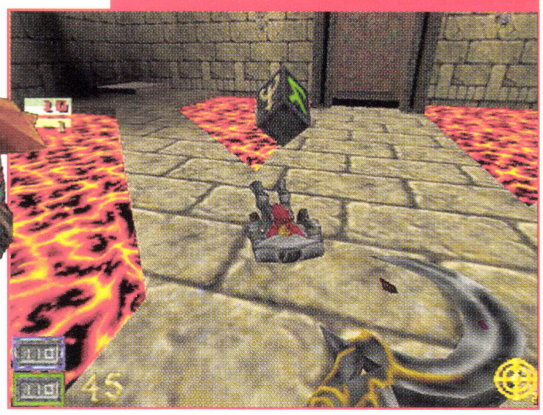


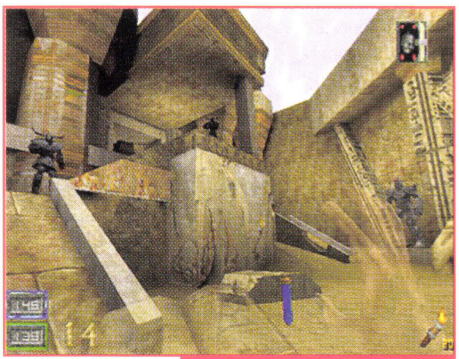


Decapitation is one of the best multiplayer features, especially in the GL version.

you'd expect. The hub system forces players to move back and forth between levels in search of clues or artifacts needed to open special portals. Gamers will either hate or love this process. On the plus side, you get more opportunities to enjoy the gorgeous level designs. The downside is that the computer opponents you must defeat don't do much other than guard duty, and that gets a little monotonous after a while. The bad dudes mostly just hang out, and not even the Spiders or Scorpions care that much about pursuing you around a corner. Only the flying Imps will go out of their way to chase you down; even the Skull Wizards seem unwilling to teleport too far from their nests.

As for multiplayer, Raven has built in five deathmatch levels. Although they are well balanced from a deathmatch perspective, they don't really accentuate the unique options of any of the four character classes. If you really want to stay in character, you'll probably want to stick with playing multiplayer matches on the regular levels.

Multiplayer games have a completely different and more enjoyable nature than the solo-play counterpart. First, you're a badass warrior and you need a badass human challenge. Second, multiplayer matches are delightfully swift, with battles starting and ending more quickly than you'd expect. Third, using your inventory correctly takes thinking as well as twitch skills—making human kills very satisfying. Especially on the regular levels, these attributes make Hexen a great multiplayer experience.



Archers aren't often fooled by invisibility spells.

But what really starts to drag Hexen II down are performance issues. In SVGA mode, running in 640-by-480 resolution on a P200, performance is fine until you get into a fight, or jump into a body of water. Even with a Diamond Stealth 3D 2000 Pro pumping 2D iron, everything starts to slow down by half. To Raven's credit, implementing a form of transparent water in SVGA is great, but it'll cost you. And when running GLHexen, a completely different set of performance issues crop up.

Installation is straightforward, and Raven has done a great job of integrating the OpenGL version of Hexen II into the setup routine. However, you'll notice that it takes awhile to load a level. Running GLHexen greatly increases the number of textures that have to be loaded and cached, therefore load times increase, and disk-access speed becomes an issue. My P200 with an enhanced IDE hard drive wasn't up to the task, but another P166 with a faster-accessing SCSI hard drive ran GLHexen as smooth as silk. It's safe to assume a growing number of people will own 3D accelerators; the same can't be said for SCSI controllers and storage devices.

There's a lot to love about Hexen II, but these performance issues keep a great game from attaining an "A" grade. But if you're lucky enough to have a killer fast system, there's nothing quite like going up against the bosses you meet upon exiting each of the four continents. They are based on the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Death, Famine, Pestilence, and War. Each one is mounted on an angry steed, and all are superbly rendered and fierce fighters. In fact, beating the Four Horsemen is much more fun than knocking off old Eidolon at the end.

You can still do damage if turned into a Sheep.

HEXEN II

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	A+
SOUND CHECK:	A
MULTIPLAYER:	A-

B+ OVERALL

A feast for the eyes, and a painful reminder that your P133 probably can't cut it much longer.

DEVELOPER:	Raven
PUBLISHER:	Activision 800-477-3650
WEB:	www.activision.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 24MB RAM, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 32MB RAM, OpenGL 3D accelerator, SCSI hard drive
STREET PRICE:	$45

TIPS ▼ In solo-play and multiplayer games, the Paladin and Necromancer are usually the characters with the best balance of weapons strength and special abilities. ▼ When she's playing solo, the Assassin's arrows have the best auto-aiming of any weapon, which makes up for the fewer hit points awarded her. ▼ The power-ups you'll need the most when playing other humans are the Tome of Power, the Glyph of the Ancients, the Chaos Device, the Bo Peep spell, and Invisibility. ▼ Read all tablets on the Egyptian level carefully, or else you'll never find the portal out. ▼ Make as many early multiplayer kills as possible so that your skill levels increase quickly—giving you an edge over your adversaries. ▼ Leave at least 40MB of space on your hard drive; otherwise, Hexen II's virtual memory will run out of hard-disk memory, and you won't be able to save your game.

PLAY THE DEMO ON PC GAMES.EXE CD-ROM

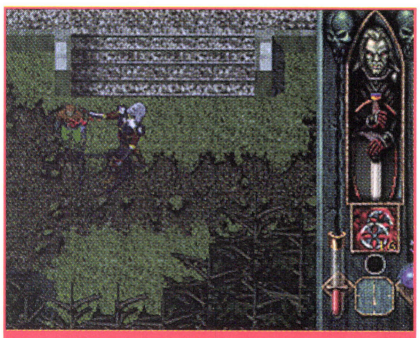
Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain

Blood-sucking vampires are cool—sometimes

By Peter Olafson

I can take or leave most game intros—they just fill the existential void between the first double-click and main menu. But Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain begins with a spectacular vampiric murder in what appears to be a cathedral. The combination of the sacred space, the unspeakable act, and the visceral terror in the faces of the victims has a horrifying resonance that I couldn't quite set aside when the day was done.

Unfortunately, that was one of the high points of my game. Nothing else I've seen in this angled-down action/adventure (which, surprisingly, is being advertised as an "epic role-playing game") had the emotional oomph of the rendered opener.



Whack attackers until they give up a spout of blood, then drink your fill to improve your health.

The tie-in to the gameplay isn't quite clear at first. When the action's handed over to the player, you find you're in control (in a limited sense) of Kain, a traveling nobleman who wanders into a bar for a drink.

Upon exit, you're quickly cornered and assassinated—I wonder why they bothered to let us play this part of the game at all—only to be resurrected by a necromancer as a pasty-faced, white-haired vampire. (Another great cut-scene here.)

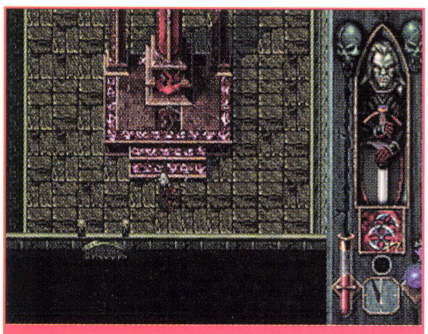
After escaping from your crypt and killing off your killers (who are conveniently hanging around the cemetery gates), you'll learn they're simply stooges. There is a deeper, darker plot—Activision reports more than 100 hours of gameplay—and it only begins with the corrupted Pillars of Nosgoth. (Yet another artful cut-scene.)

It's certainly fun to spend a few hours traipsing around the huge countryside hacking and slashing, drinking blood, collecting spells, changing into a wolf or bat (and, eventually, mist and your old self), and solving basic puzzles. (*This* pressure plate opens *that* door.) But uncovering the true background to your undead status is what's supposed to keep you passing those hours. As the docs state, the rules are reversed: Night is good. Water is bad. Crypts are home. And you're the monster.

Unfortunately, Kain quickly runs into a problem: A little goes a long way, and it ultimately goes on and on. The next few hours prove to be pretty much like the first few, and the few after that like the few before them.

No wonder Kain gets upstaged by its cut-scenes. The perspective, from way overhead, is dated and uninvolving—I'd have preferred an Alone in the Dark/Tomb Raider approach. Interaction is strictly proscribed, with no option for conversation, and you'll mostly find yourself whacking folks and sucking down the red stuff. And since monsters respawn, revisiting a region means hacking and slashing through the whole sick crew again.

As a port, it's respectable. The voice-over is first-rate—authentic, passionate, even literate. The graphics are colorful, albeit in a stylized, console sort of way, and the lighting effects in the crypts—where you'll have to go to save your game (among other things)—are appropriately moody. New are the additional resolutions, which you can cycle through with a keypress, including a crisp 640-by-480 zoomable miniature.



Luckily, the save-game shrines are everywhere.

Ooh—she's gonna feel that tomorrow.

But, for me, raising Kain was easier said than done. Booting Blood Omen as it was installed proved the fastest route to a locked-up black screen—until I manually uninstalled DirectX 5.0 and installed DirectX 3 from the Kain CD. (Activision customer service reports there are no current plans for a patch.) Given the proximity of Kain's and DX5's respective release dates, this oversight is simply unacceptable—as is the tedium that is Legacy of Kain.

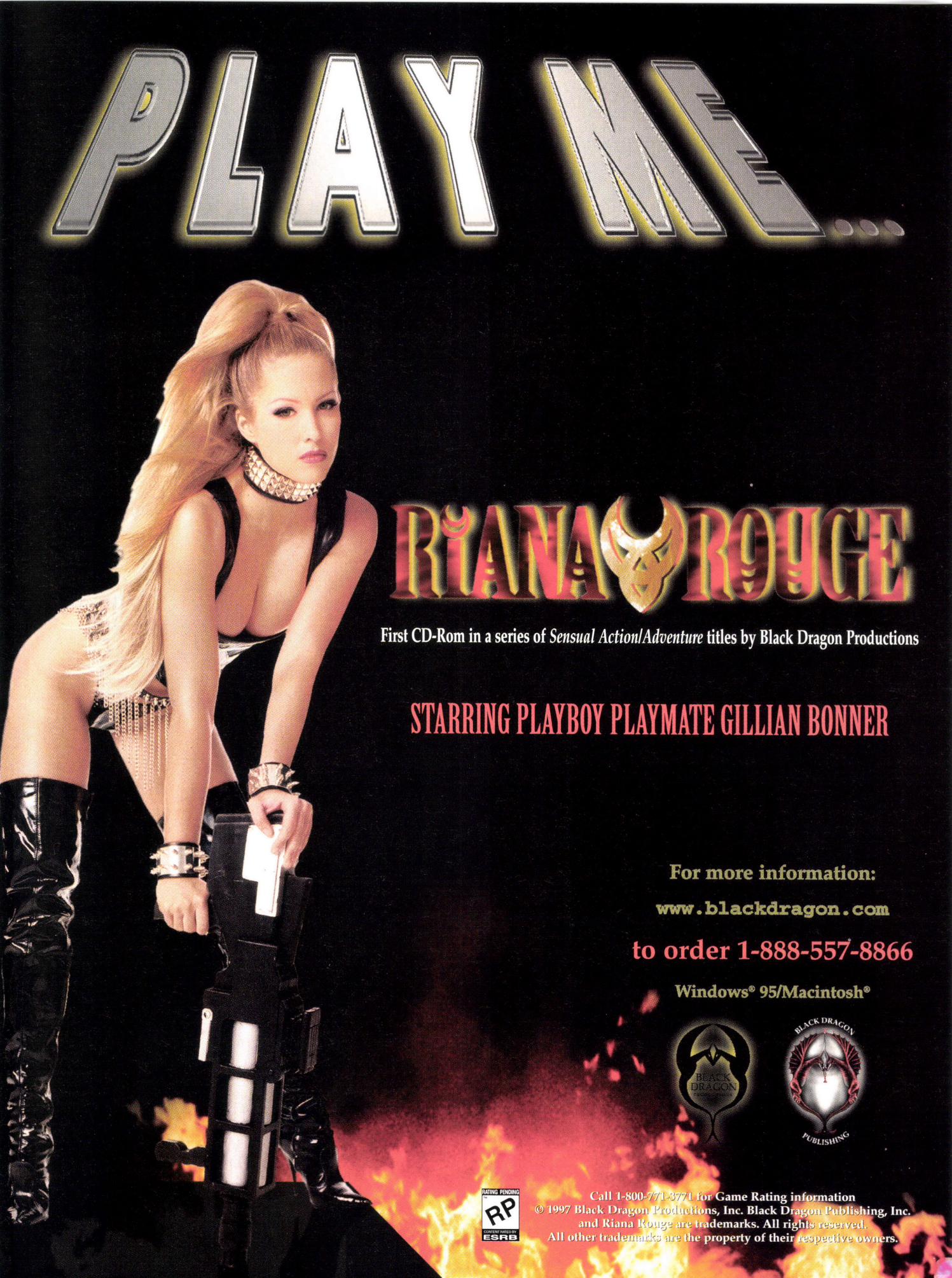
BLOOD OMEN: LEGACY OF KAIN

GAMEPLAY:	D+
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	C
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	D+
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Who thought being a vampire could be so dull?

DEVELOPER:	Crystal Dynamics
PUBLISHER:	Activision 800-477-3650
WEB:	www.activision.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P100, 16MB RAM, 12MB HD, 1MB video card, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 195MB HD
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ The first thing to learn is not to hack everybody to death. Just make 'em bleed, and then suck 'em dry. You'll quickly get a sense of how many blows it takes to produce the desired result. ▼ If you feel stuck, you may be in the wrong body. Try switching over to the wolf, whose leaping ability is instrumental in reaching otherwise inaccessible areas.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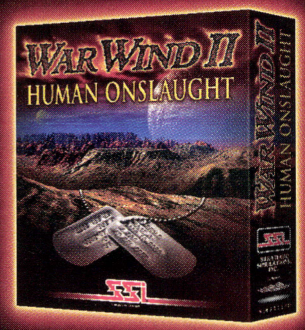

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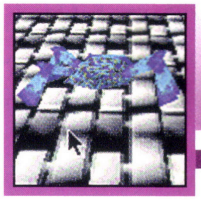


Galapagos

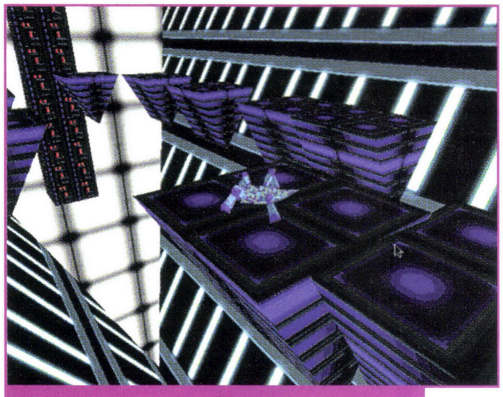
That way, dammit! That way!

By Bob Lindstrom

The good news is that someone has finally custom-designed a game that appeals to NERMs. The bad news, fellow game *nerds*, is that isn't a typo. It's a science fair–like acronym for Non-stationary Entropic Reduction Mapping.

You'll get more than a whiff of the science fair while playing Galapagos, a game proudly, cleverly, and sometimes tediously based on developer Anark's approach to artificial intelligence (the previously mentioned NERM).

The NERM-bound character in question is Mendel, a tiny buglike creature whose goal is to use his AI to escape from Galapagos, a neon-injected environment that looks like the '80s film *Tron* charged up on '90s designer drugs.



Mendel moves over slippery sliding platforms.

Mendel doesn't have to rely entirely on his simulated infrared vision, his limited yet highly adaptable tactile sense, and his artificial-life programming, though. He also has you to help him navigate the shifting platforms, smashing blocks, and soaring elevators of Galapagos.

By clicking on elements in the environment and giving Mendel the occasional right-click slap upside the thorax, you influence his movements. That's *influence*. Galapagos' most innovative aspect is that Mendel is guided almost entirely by his AI. You may be able to teach him, guide him, channel his efforts by controlling the movement of platforms and elevators; but—like cats and significant others—he'll rarely do just what you expect him to do.

Therein lies both the strength and much of the weakness of Galapagos' design. Training and channeling Mendel's limited intelligence becomes an often-intriguing experiment in low-level psychology. But Galapagos' concept violates one of the prime rules of game design: ultimately, the player needs to feel in control of the game environment. In this respect, Galapagos teeters awkwardly—the player leans between fascination with Mendel's limited brain and the inclination to just yell, "Not that way, moron, the *other* way."

Watching Mendel slip beyond mouse control could be forgiven, though, if the level designs were more varied and imaginative. Despite the highly pitched NERM and Mendel's AI, a cynic could just see Galapagos as a simple design-reversal on the platform game. Instead of controlling the lead character as he moves through an uncontrollable environment, Galapagos makes the player control the environment as an uncontrollable lead character moves through it.

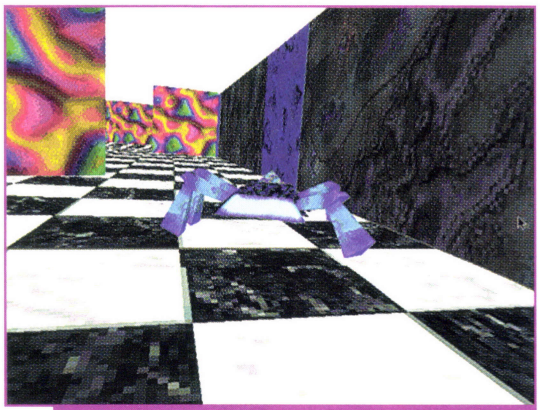
To the game's detriment, that environment relies too heavily on walking Mendel over moving platforms, or between threatening masses that move like moving platforms. Yes, there are subtle variations on these themes; but compared to the incredible variety that level-design geniuses of Tomb Raider or Duke 3D have achieved, Galapagos is painfully repetitive. The levels illustrate the science-fair invention of Mendel's AI well but don't quite move beyond to become an involving experience.

Still, this is a first effort. The polished production values point to good things from Anark. The visual setting, at its worst, is barren. At its best, it has a grandeur and scale enhanced by the computer-controlled camera movements. And like the aforementioned Tomb Raider, 3Dfx support gives a very clean-cut image, in keeping with the game's progressive-technology slant.

Mendel dodges boxes that move like sliding platforms.

The 3D directional sound environment also adds greatly to the reality and fantasy of glowing Galapagos. And Mendel's endearing C-3PO–like blurbles and beeps truly add charm to an otherwise somewhat faceless character.

I can think of dozens of ways that Anark's NERM technology could enhance games. They're on a fertile track here. And if their first effort lacks the exceptional game design that today's competitive market demands, Galapagos still points to intriguing possibilities.



Mendel slips over sliding, moving platforms.

GALAPAGOS

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS :	B
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	C
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Rich possibilities, but lacks level-design and play-balance expertise.

DEVELOPER:	Anark
PUBLISHER:	Electronic Arts 800-245-4525
WEB:	www.ea.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 60MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$45

TIPS ▼ Disabling Mendel's movement is often as useful as enabling his movement. Think of corralling a cow. ▼ An occasional sacrifice for the sake of learning is worthwhile. Mendel understands life-threatening situations *after* he's experienced them. Just don't overdo it, or you'll end up with a neurotic NERM on your hands. ▼ Out and back. Out and back. Go out. Throw a switch. Come back. It's a common theme in Galapagos. Watch for it. ▼ Learn quickly how to slip Mendel across sliding, moving platforms.

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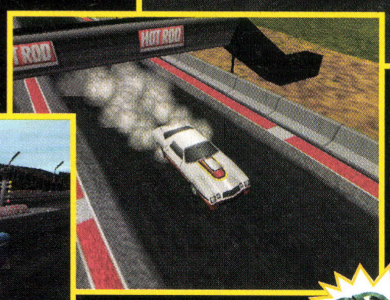

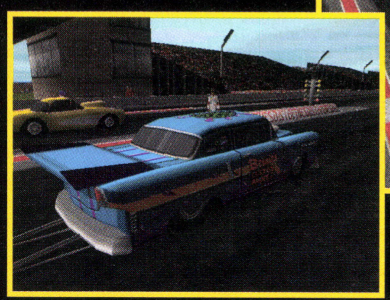

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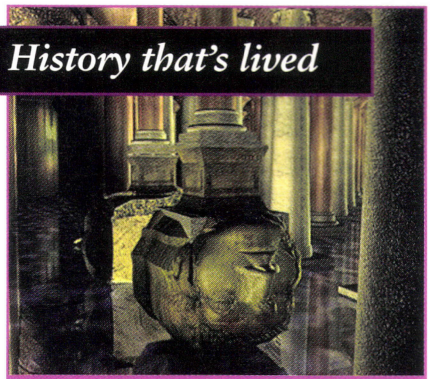
Byzantine: The Betrayal

By Barry Brenesal

Few cultures have intrigued the West like modern-day Turkey—particularly Istanbul. Not one, but two romantic eras sprang from it: the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. Both were centers of learning, wealth, and military might, extravagant artistic accomplishment and display. Both are gone, but their treasures remain. So, too, do unscrupulous thieves who seek to pirate these antiquities and engage in lucrative black-market sales to private collectors.

History that's lived



Istanbul's ancient treasures—targets for thieves and smugglers.

In Byzantine: The Betrayal, you play an American journalist whose old college friend, Emre Bahis, invites you to his native land when he's uncovered just such a smuggling ring. Upon arrival, you discover that Emre has gone into hiding, with both the police and the smugglers on his trail. A series of clues reveals an ingenious twist to the crimes: these priceless antiquities are believed lost to history and are virtually undocumented. Buried and unprotected, the exact items are nearly impossible to trace once stolen. Great journalistic material...if you get out alive.

The visuals in Byzantine take place in two worlds. There are clever sequences where you use a high-tech computer to image Istanbul's past, architecture, and long-forgotten treasures—they reappear before your eyes. The "other" Istanbul features videos that were shot live on location. When the cinematics stop, you can turn 360 degrees and move through selected paths within these environments, asking branching dialogue questions of the game's suspects and bystanders, and gathering clues to the crime sites.

The videos are very different from your standard filmed game-sequences. They reveal a colorful, loud Istanbul teeming with people, noisy businesses, and walls needing paint. Bazaars, mosques, taxicabs, and advertising jostle for attention. This Istanbul mirrors reality, and Byzantine's excellent actors come across as real human beings rather than as the "beautiful people" both Hollywood and computer games toss our way with monotonous regularity. The gritty environment, dialogue, and storyline produce a genuine feeling of danger.

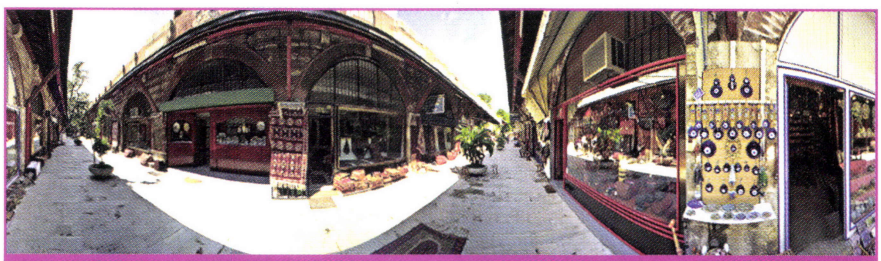
Someone's bound to ask, "But does Byzantine teach cultural heritage?" My reply would be, "Better than any game I've seen thus far." Previous historically themed graphical adventures like SPQR and Qin used airless, empty surroundings, reinforcing the notion of a culture existing in a vacuum, minus people, ideas, and emotions—as if, somehow, the art created itself outside time. Byzantine links its cultural artifacts with modern-day Turkey in a variety of subtle, referential ways (modern architecture, decorative objects, music, etc.) that reflect the living continuity of art and craftsmanship.

It's true that Byzantine offers few puzzles, but solving them puts you through seven delightfully immersive CDs' worth of hints, research, interrogations, and more than 150 inventory items. In the computer-simulated part of the game, you must reconstruct the smugglers' intended theft sites using their own methods. The treasure is always cleverly hidden: A good-luck charm in a tiny alleyway shop,

Did you remember to pack your camera?

a traditional Turkish board game that you have to win—these and other similar hint sources are extremely well integrated with the plot's suspenseful mixture of murder and mystery.

One annoyance is worth mentioning: Some of the object-hunting is rote, requiring nothing more than moving the cursor over the screen until it morphs into a magnifying glass. That aside, Byzantine convinces. Its innovative combination of cinema vérité, 120 interactive locations, computer-rendered historical re-creations, and a gripping, realistic storyline raise this graphical adventure far above the norm.



Much more than a slideshow—Byzantine is alive with detail.

BYZANTINE: THE BETRAYAL

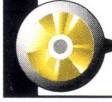
GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS :	A-
SOUND CHECK:	A-
OVERALL	A-

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Immerse yourself in this historical twist on Istanbul and smuggling.

PUBLISHER:	Discovery Channel Multimedia 800-678-3343
WEB:	www.planetexplorer.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 30MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ Sounds are realistically mixed, so you may not notice the phone ringing in the noisy city environment. It's Emre: if you miss him the first time, he'll call again. ▼ As a rule, if you can access something, it'll be of some use in the game. The Roman hoist diagram in Emre's Ancient Engineering text, for instance, will help you much later. ▼ Save frequently. You'll get in deep trouble if you hang around the wrong people or places.



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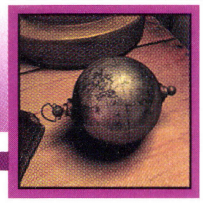


Riven

By Barry Brenesal

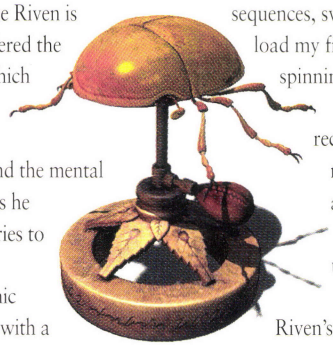
Eerie passageways across five islands beckon you to explore and comprehend.

Myst's combination of slick graphics, visionary storyline, and slightly surrealistic universe made it a legend and bestseller four years ago—one that, staggeringly, is still No. 1 in the sales charts to this day. Finally there is Riven, the successor to Myst...and the legend grows.

Riven continues the story of Atrus and his family troubles. You'll recall his tangle in Myst with his irresponsible, ambitious sons Sirrus and Achenar. They're lambs compared to their formidable, anal-retentive scientist grandfather, Gehn. Obsessed with the vanished D'ni civilization to the point of reconstituting it regardless of any other culture's destruction, Gehn was tricked by Atrus more than three decades ago into taking a one-way, no-return passage to Riven. Unfortunately, Atrus' wife, Catherine, disappeared there more recently, presumably kidnapped by Gehn. Your task is to trick Gehn once more, freeing Catherine. Still with us?

Myst, only more so

And this won't be easy, because Riven is Gehn's world. He's obviously ordered the people to avoid and track you (which conveniently eliminates the need for human interaction). To succeed, you must come to understand the mental workings of Gehn and the systems he controls, employing your discoveries to bypass his security checks.



Conventionally designed graphic adventures like Myst provide you with a relatively small number of rooms at any given time. Solve whatever is blocking your passage, and you receive another few rooms and another puzzle. Not so with Riven. At the start, a large series of areas are open to investigation, but there's no clue what to do aside from locating Catherine and Gehn. Puzzle solving is subsumed in puzzle finding. This more subtle dilemma is just as frustrating and even more fun, because it's more credible: in real life, we have to detect the problems inherent in any environment before we can attempt to discover the tools to unravel them. Riven's linearity is cleverly hidden behind the baffling, extensive archipelago sites you can visit and examine.

However, this approach to gameplay comes at a price. I realize that many graphic adventures span multiple CDs, providing more game for the buck; still, frequently switching Riven's five CDs is a hassle. I changed CDs four times in the first 30 minutes of play alone. On one memorable occasion I started a save-game, clicked through the four intro sequences, switched CDs, and attempted to load my file before the disk had stopped spinning. "Game not found, starting new game" was the message I received on the screen, and it was not welcome. I had to swap CDs and start the entire process once more. Wars have been started under less provocation.

There are no problems with Riven's interface, though. You point, you go—assuming there's a path. If you point and it's an object that can be manipulated in some way, like a valve or a button, the view may zoom in and you use it. The very few inventory items that exist are lined up beneath the main screen. The few options that exist are available from a dull and incongruous menu that pops up when you click above the main screen. That's it.

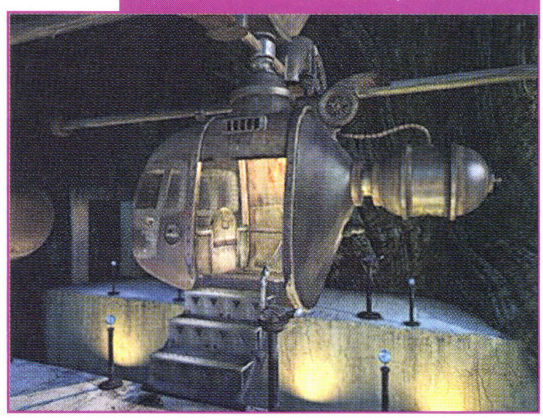
Visually, Riven marks a step forward from Myst. No longer does it jump from screenshot to screenshot. Instead, you click and glide forward through the landscape. You can turn on an axis at most locations, though the lack of a conventional series of angles makes this a little tricky to handle. Many places offer four images at 90-degree angles, while others provide two images at 180 degrees. There are also quite a few that supply three images. Mapmaking is essential, as they told you in scouting camp—the concept of losing you in the wonderful environment being the acceptable excuse for not having an automap.

Riven's design team is as adept as ever in handcrafting computer-rendered scenes that are disturbing for their subtle wrongness. The perspectives when climbing ladders are too extreme, for instance. Elaborately carved heavy iron doors that wouldn't seem out of place in a Sumerian temple front small cylinder stone huts.

On another, more obvious level, Riven shows the same haunting combination of three technological levels that its predecessor had in abundance. There's the mythic Iron Age culture, a late 19th-century Industrial Age with overtones of Jules Verne, and a futuristic science world. At any time, one of these worlds may hide another just beneath its surface, ready to confound at the first click.

The images themselves are crisp and clear, with discreet animation in many scenes of birds, lapping water, and insects. This works very well in the river and forest sequences; too bad the Cyan design team

One of Riven's mechanized transportation systems, when you can't get somewhere on foot. Take two Dramamine, and sit back.



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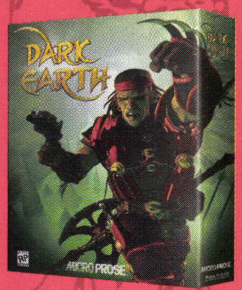

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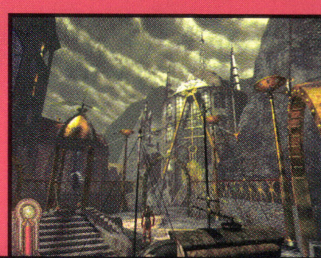

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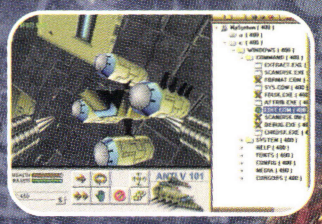

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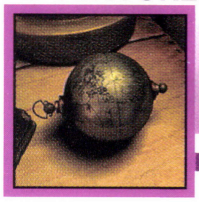


Inside The Great Golden Dome lies a control room, but the catwalks to it are incomplete.

Short videos like this one of sea mammals sunning themselves help bring the archipelago to life.

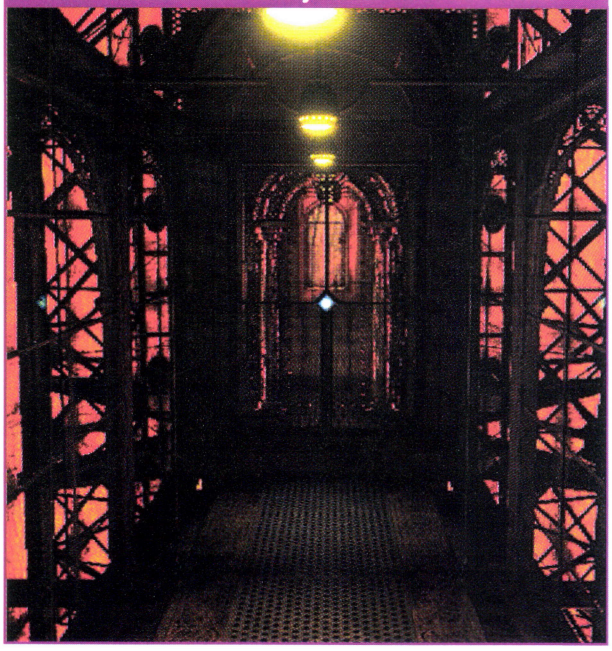
didn't add similar touches of environmental life to the clouds and shadows. Animating the passing clouds and shadows would have added a sense of reality to those lengthy mountain treks, where it's sadly lacking.

As compensation, there are the non-interactive videos—a form of passive non-entertainment I normally look forward to with the same fond expectation I accord winter flu; but not here. Most of Riven's film clips are limited to short, mood-enhancing events within the game. A primitive messaging tower signals your arrival to someone unseen; the signaler ducks out of sight. A pair of sea mammals senses your approach, and they waddle off their sunning rock back into the water. Each clip is well placed, convincingly reproduced, and truly atmospheric.

Equally atmospheric are the various means of transportation around the archipelago, resembling computer-generated hybrids that combine roller-coasters, white-water rafting, and a subway ride. Sound confusing? All will be clear when you turn out the lights, stare at the screen, and pull the lever. Happy trails.

Riven uses environmental sounds outdoors and adds a New Age soundtrack for indoors sequences. The latter works better, because it remains divorced from the images while still influencing the mood. The environmental sounds, on the other hand, are two-dimensional: they change as you move from screenshot to screenshot, but they're inflexible behind any given image. The same birdcalls at identical intervals sound canned.

At times, Riven's Industrial Age machines hauntingly recall Jules Verne and 19th-century France—as in this elevator.



So is Riven a worthwhile successor to Myst? My own personal opinion should be clear by now: Riven certainly lives up to the expectations of Myst fans—grumblings about sound, CD-ROM switches, and static mountains notwithstanding. It's wonderfully atmospheric in ways that Myst only hinted at. There are plenty of complex puzzles, all perfectly natural and suited to their respective locations. Thus, the puzzles don't feel superimposed upon either the environment or the plot, breaking the mood of its great visuals. Only Obsidian, in my experience, manages to achieve this rare distinction.

Whether you like Riven or not will depend on the kind of graphic adventure you enjoy. If you prefer your meal served up with plenty of inventory manipulation (Space Bar, Smoking Mirror), stylish mini-games (Timelapse, Clandestiny), or dialog puzzles (Titanic, Sentient), look elsewhere. But if you enjoy apparently nonlinear, observation-oriented quests filled with enough haunting mood to fill your dreams, you've come to the right place.

RIVEN

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B

B+ OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Great graphics and plenty of difficult object-manipulation puzzles: Myst fans will be pleased.

DEVELOPER:	Cyan Software
PUBLISHER:	Red Orb 800-548-1798
WEB:	www.cyan.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P100, 16MB RAM, 75MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ If you want to get a feel for what you're up against with Gehn, visit the golden temple with the huge interior pentagram. (It's on the main route after you first arrive.) Leave via the main door, rather than the side route you took to enter. Turn around, and re-enter. ▼ Explore every view from every square. Click on anything that looks like it might be remotely interesting. There are objects and passageways that aren't hidden, but are camouflaged or easily overlooked. ▼ There are useful hints in the video clips. The guard shot with the blowgun after you arrive—surely that indicates dissent in Gehn's global theocracy? ▼ Read Atrus' diary carefully and take notes (of your own—there's no option built in). His plans for dealing with Gehn are of particular importance, and you never want to lose track of that as you progress through the game. ▼ Push every button, pull every lever, climb every mountain... ▼ The easiest way to lose the game is refusing to do what Gehn asks. ▼ Remember, defeating Gehn isn't enough. To truly win, you must free Catherine before you summon Atrus.

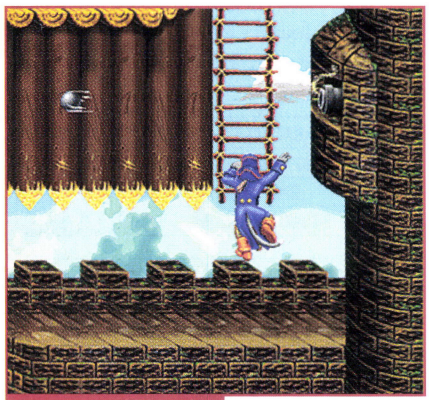
Claw

By Peter Olafson

No, it's not a new weapon for Blood

Now this is a stretch. Last time we heard from Monolith, it had just wrapped up the grisly 3D shooter Blood. Claw, an airy platform game that was once the exclusive province of the pre–3D Realms Apogee, is the other side of the coin, and it's pure gold.

Throw pirate cats together with a dog armada, and, not too surprisingly, they're going to fight like…ahem…cats and dogs. Claw, the pirate captain, is captured, imprisoned, and awaiting execution in a lengthy intro that blends rendered 3D sequences with 2D Don Bluth–like character animation. Desperate to escape, he scours the walls of his cell and, behind a loose stone, finds a dog-eared letter referring to the legendary Amulet of Nine Lives—a potential marketing tie-in for cat food if I ever heard one—and a piece of a map. When his opportunity comes to overpower a guard, he takes it.



Timing is everything.

The 14-level trek to find the rest of that map—and the nine jewels set in the Amulet—finds Claw using sword and pistol to knock off enemies; collecting reams of burnished, bouncing goodies; dealing with simple-but-intense action puzzles (usually involving timing); and uncovering the odd secret or surprise. (What, I have to describe a *platform* game to you?)

Now, I have to admit that, prior to my acquaintance with Claw, I would have had approximately zero interest in a cute arcade game about cats and dogs. Sounds like something for the under-10s, yes?

But once the game started, my resolve lasted about three seconds—that's not hyperbole but an accurate estimate. It's as immersive as anything I've played recently, and I got into it in no time. The animation is lithe and speedy, the colors supple, the sound a wonderfully dense construct (a great cannonball splash as fallen enemies land in the water below), and the gameplay's just fat with fun. The game races along in splendid fashion, and the designers were thoughtful enough to have Claw issue spoken warnings to slow you down for the trickier bits.

Use your pistol to whap enemies from a distance. This one's given up a first-aid potion.

Someone was thinking here. In fact, there's a sense of someone thinking throughout. The save mechanism is sensible: Your progress is saved permanently at certain points during the course of a level and temporarily at others. So is the configurable keyboard layout. (I think I looked at the default once, and that was enough.) I didn't find even the smallest of technical glitches; it's solid as a rock.

It's also multiplayer with a vengeance. Claw supports LAN, modem-to-modem, and serial play, and—get this—up to 64 people when played over Engage (accessed via the Internet or AOL at $1.95 an hour). That sounds wild, especially when you consider the addition of six curses (of the voodoo variety) that you can hurl at your opponents. (Note: To judge from messages on the Claw Web page, the game will also work over Kali.)

Quibbles? None, really, and I can't remember the last game I said that about. To be sure, Claw's a conventional platformer in the console mode. (Virgin's Aladdin comes to mind by way of comparison, and that's high praise.) But it's so well conceived and assembled—and so damn playable—that conventionality's never an issue.

Indeed, it's part of Claw's triumph: Here's a PC game that compares favorably to console classics, and in some respects surpasses them. Who could ask for anything more?

Some platforms will crumble when you jump on them, so be ready to jump again quickly.

CLAW

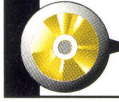
GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS :	A-
SOUND CHECK:	A
MULTIPLAYER:	A

A OVERALL

Who'd have thought it? A class-A platformer from the makers of Blood.

PUBLISHER:	Monolith Productions 800-381-3581
WEB:	www.lith.com
PLATFORM:	DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P75, 16MB RAM, 2MB HD, 2MB video card, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P100, 114MB HD
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ Newbies should watch the pattern of platforms opening and closing, and figure out a safe path in advance. ▼ Stick to your sword for routine enemy bashing, and use your pistol sparingly—for instance, to blow up powder barrels and do your dirty work at a distance. ▼ Personally, I like the keyboard for precise control.



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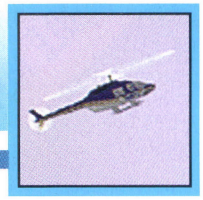


Microsoft Flight Simulator '98

By Peter Olafson

Fly almost anywhere

The 737 over the New York suburbs, as seen from the spotter-plane view.

As a computer pilot, I'm more of a passenger. While some jet-setters get high on radio frequencies and instrument systems with acronymic names, I find myself in spins and stalls because my nose is glued to the glass instead of the dash. A cockpit is the ultimate window seat, and Microsoft Flight Simulator '98 is certainly one for the window-seat crowd.

This 15th anniversary edition of the best-selling PC game adds to FS '96's feature set with support for a range of new gaming technologies (MMX, 3D accelerator cards, Internet play, and force-feedback joysticks). In addition, there's a huge roster of airports with a worldwide reach, as well as three new aircraft. By and large, these are commendable qualities. Flight Sim has never looked better or felt so incalculably huge.

One of FS '98's more hair-raising adventures is to cruise down Fifth Avenue in a Cessna and see if you can make it through midtown Manhattan without getting your wings clipped...

It's almost too easy to get airborne. The Fly Now! icon on the main screen takes you to the default tour of the towers of Chicago's Loop. Gun the engine of your Cessna, slip off the brakes, and the plane will almost throw itself into the air.

If you're ripe for more details, Learn to Fly takes you to two dozen hands-on lessons—with the option to pass control to your instructor—and detailed hypertext instructions. Select A Flight gives you access to nearly 200 built-in missions.

If you like, you can create your own scenario. Pick an aircraft (now including the Cessna 182 Skylane, the new Bell 206 chopper, and the not-even-out-yet Learjet 45), the weather, time of day, airport, and even the runway—using a handy search mechanism to narrow down your choices. FS '98 comes with some 3,000 airports. Here, finally, is a Microsoft Flight Sim that doesn't really need a data disk.

The view's fine, especially in target-rich environments like Manhattan. The graphics, especially for the aircraft, acquire a silvery smoothness when displayed on 3D-hardware–accelerated systems. It's not quite Flight Unlimited—there's still a sense of a simulator around you—but its effect is pleasantly hypnotic for a flight-sim tourist like me.

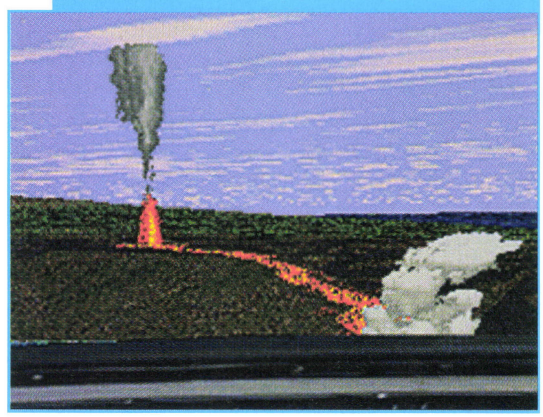
Now, this isn't to say that the designers haven't attended to the intricacies of control and configuration. You can do just about anything you care to with your plane, down to adjusting the fuel supply and turning instruments on and off or hiding them entirely. The planes, each with its own control panel, do handle convincingly—the Boeing 737-400 commercial jetliner moves like a sleepy bull elephant, and you can feel the radio-controlled–craft immediacy of the little Cessnas.

Yet, for all the time this flight-sim chestnut has been in development—Bruce Artwick's original MSF 1.0 surfaced in November 1982—it still makes some miscues. For one thing, FS '98 could use a little more presentational polish. While the sim loaded in scenery from the CD (a custom install allows you to move regions to your hard disk), the screen display looked like it was pumping in unadorned graphic sets from prior versions of FS.

Now, I'd argue that the way a program looks when loading is largely irrelevant. That's sort of like taking a picture of someone with one leg in his trousers. But it's also unfair to show that snapshot to the poor fellow's would-be bride on the eve of her wedding. It left me with the unhappy, back-of-the-mind impression that FS '98 was simply a new transparency overlaid on existing technology.

The graphics in the actual game aren't all up to the same level, either. The colorful thatch of flat terrain is

...while another finds you checking out lava flow.



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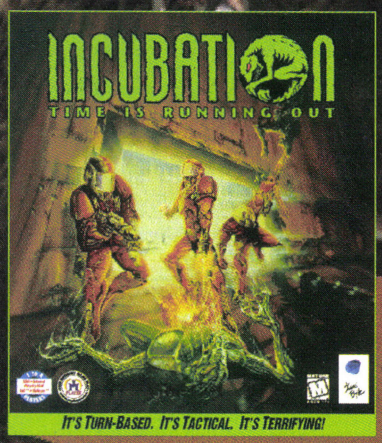

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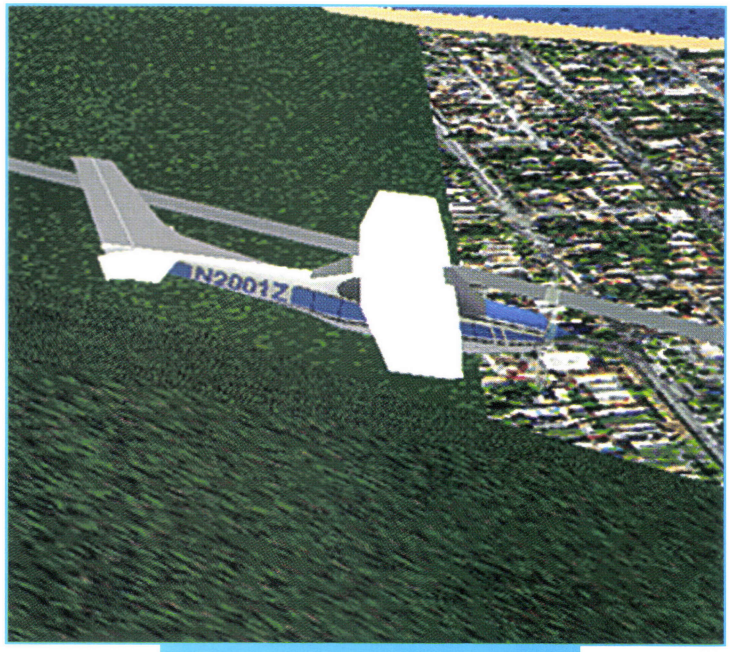
realistic enough when the plane's at altitude, but close in it's just an unidentifiable blur. I'd like at least to have had the option to render the landscape in detail commensurate with a machine's horsepower. Distant portions of the sky and sometimes close-up segments of the ground occasionally break up and shimmy around, an apparent perspective-correction issue of the sort that 3D accelerator support should have addressed.

Most of the time, the frame rate was good enough that it wasn't an issue. But it died and went to hell on my P200 (with MMX and Orchid's Righteous 3D card) when the virtual-cockpit view was enabled.

Multiplayer may be a bumpy ride. Its best quality is its versatility: FS '98 supports IPX networks and modem and serial connections, and it handles Internet play via Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone (**www.zone.com**).

But a potentially large and angry fly in the ointment is that the Zone itself requires Internet Explorer 3.01 or better, and it doesn't support Netscape browsers (not even Communicator 4.03, which I use for most of my online explorations). The Zone does report that it's working on the problem, but doesn't say when it's expected to be resolved. Naturally, it provides a link to allow luckless Netscape owners to download IE. This mass disenfranchising, even if temporary, is at best shortsighted and at worst an example of Microsoft behaving in the way critics typically chastise it for behaving.

Fortunately, I also have an AOL account, and AOL 3.0 uses IE 3.02 as its Web browser. After three downloads totaling close to 4MB of front-end software, I was up and running on the Zone. (Question: If this software is necessary for Net play, why isn't it on the FS '98 CD?)



The Antilles, a little too close up. Now, where did I put that parachute?

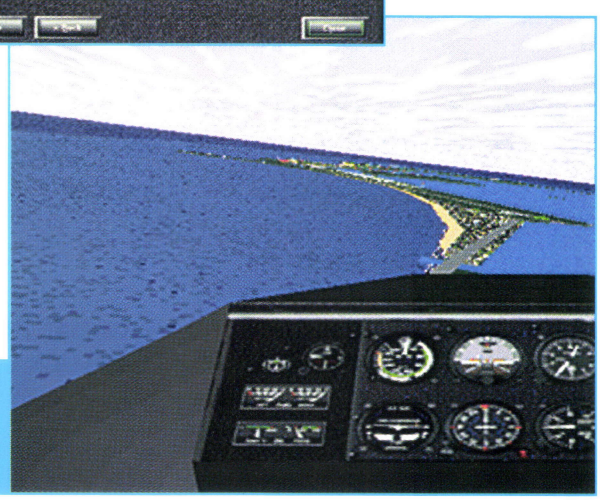
Unfortunately, despite good crowds in the FS '98 chat section, I wasn't able to get into a game with more than one other person. Even then, there was a slight speed hit—it remains to be seen what'll happen when the server's tracking as many as eight pilots—but the sim remained playable. And it was an unexpected pleasure when, reappearing in takeoff position after a not-quite-successful passage between the Sears Tower's twin antennae, my colleague flew just a few feet over my head and made a three-point landing. With a crowd, this could be really fun—even without machine guns.

It would've been even more fun with greater variety. For all the volumes of sky, airports, and cities mapped onto FS '98's CD, the game's oddly short on planes—there are just eight of them. What about a selection of historical aircraft—military planes like the giant C-5a transport or the lumbering, eight-engined B-52g? Or the Concorde? Or the ability to construct your own (a la Domark's FlightSim Toolkit)? They've gone pleasantly nuts over the game's physical dimensions. Why not in craft variety?

Finally, a sim that can teach us how to fly should also show us how to crash. FS '98 handles minor events like rough landings authentically enough, but crashes at speed produce a jumble of toy-like parts and the dated cracked-windshield effect that's been with us since at least the mid-'80s—remember Test Drive 2?

But the view was nice on the way down, and if my nose hadn't been pressed against the glass, I wouldn't have noticed a thing.

What's the most remote airport you can think of? It's probably here.



Whew. I pulled up just in time. Here I am, frightening beach-goers in the virtual cockpit view.

FLIGHT SIMULATOR '98

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	C

Huge, sprawling locations don't camouflage some of FS '98's limitations.

PUBLISHER:	Microsoft 800-426-9400
WEB:	www.microsoft.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95/NT CD
REQUIRES:	486/66, 8MB RAM, 100MB HD, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 16MB RAM, 3D graphics accelerator, force-feedback joystick, 28.8 modem
STREET PRICE:	$60

TIPS ▼ This sim's got a few nice Easter eggs sensitive to time and location. Here's the path to one of them:

Select Fly Now from the opening screen and then World from the main menu. Now, select Go To and then Exact Location. Set the latitude to N36* 1.12'. Set the longitude to W75* 40.68'. Set altitude to 85. Set the heading to 85 and click OK. Open the World menu again. This time select Time & Season, then click on the season tab and Set Exact Date. Set the GMT month to 12, the GMT Day to 17, and GMT Year to 1903. Now click on OK, and you'll find yourself...

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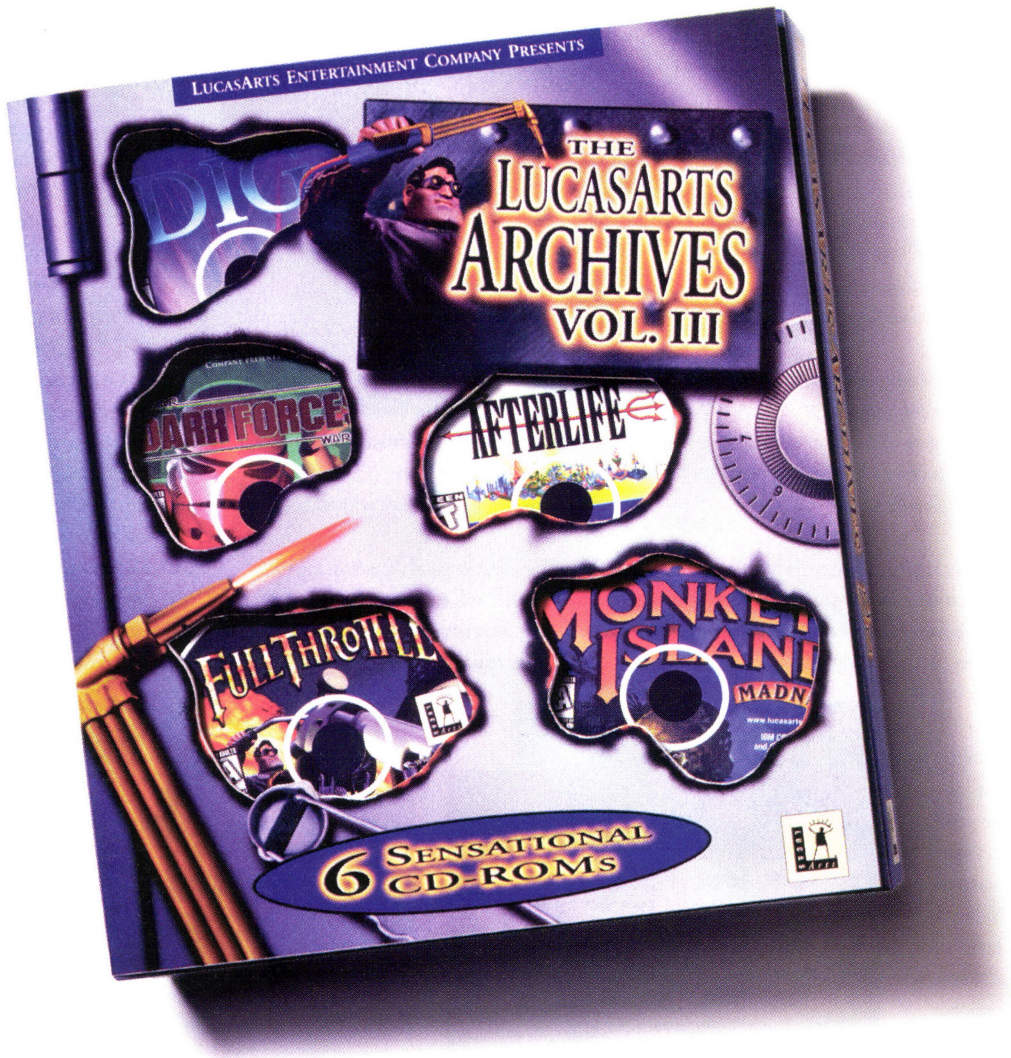

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iF-16

By Marc Dultz

It's certainly been a long time since Falcon 3.0's ascendance to the sim throne. In fact, few air-combat simulations have successfully rivaled the aging product in detail and overall capability, although EF2000 currently stands out as the one to beat. However, with its release of iF-16, Digital Integration (which developed such award-winning hits as Tornado, Apache, and Hind) makes a serious bid at surpassing Falcon in sheer authenticity.

Published by Interactive Magic, iF-16 makes a bold attempt at unseating the king of air-combat sims by integrating state-of-the-art improvements and exciting features, ensuring itself a place on the flight-sim honor roll. Based on the Block C Mid-Life Update version of the US Air Force's Fighting Falcon, iF-16 accurately models virtually every important weapons, targeting, and avionics system on the F-16 with exacting detail.

Friendly skies—for the most part

You can reconfigure the two multifunction displays to suit mission parameters.

Using two symmetrically positioned multifunction displays (MFDs), iF-16 models the all-new Westinghouse APG-68 radar fitted onto the new F-16s, which was specially developed for low-level, nap-of-the-earth combat missions. iF-16's radar realistically portrays, among other things, the LANTIRN (Low Altitude Navigation Targeting Infrared for Night) tracking computer, as well as the Fixed Target Track, Ground Vehicle Track, and Radar Cluster resolution modes. Weapons management and system monitoring are also graphically represented.

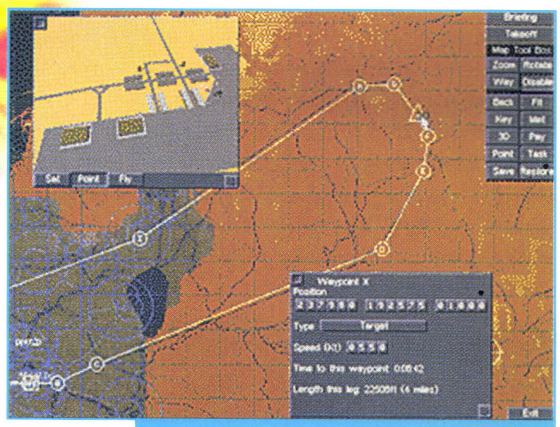
iF-16 wasn't designed to accommodate I-Magic's uninspiring DEMON-1 terrain-mapping engine, expressly developed for iF-22. In its stead, iF-16 employs a gouraud-shaded, texture-mapped, polygon-based terrain engine, which, while ably serving its purpose, comes across as a tad bland and somewhat featureless to behold.

iF-16, like Falcon 3.0, also has a robust mission-planner, which displays mission waypoints, SAM and AAA sites, military facilities, meteorological information, and salient geographic characteristics. Players can customize proposed flight plans by adjusting ingress and egress routes in accordance with mission parameters and likely ambush sites. Moreover, you can modify your aircraft's payload and avionics loadout and even view a 3D flyby of any map segment.

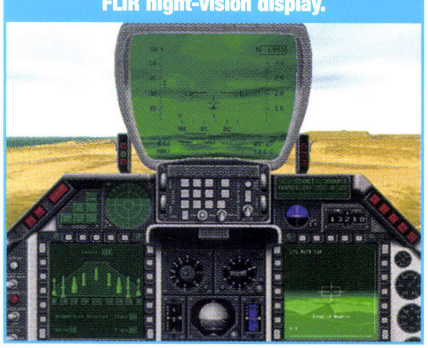
iF-16 contains all the features needed to stay abreast with some of the more recent air-combat entries. There's a full suite of single-player modes, including training, quick-start, individual missions, and three linear campaign paths (depicting potential near-term conflicts in Israel, Cyprus, and Korea). There are wingmen to command, and you can play in various eight-player modes like deathmatch and built-in Capture the Flag. iF-16 can be performance-tuned, too—you adjust the difficulty level and visual settings according to your needs.

Unfortunately, the game exhibits certain deficiencies that, when taken collectively, are inexplicable at best. For starters, the advanced F-16 model isn't equipped with an IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) transponder. As a result, you're apprised from the get-go whether or not the aircraft you're tracking is friendly or enemy, which detracts a bit from the realism.

Still other minor problems plague the system. The campaign games aren't dynamically constructed, the padlock view is somewhat disconcerting to use, the cockpit isn't mouse-driven, and, most disturbing of all, there's no rear view. While you get virtual and snap views slaved to various 45-degree quadrants, there's no way to visually check six!



iF-16's mission-planner lets players toggle waypoints, examine objectives, and reconfigure aircraft loadouts.



The HUD can be reconfigured to portray a FLIR night-vision display.

Just the same, iF-16's numerous strengths easily outweigh its curt list of annoyances. For my money, it's one of the most impressive air-combat simulations ever to hit the tarmac; I just wish it had spent a little more time in the hangar before being cleared for takeoff.

iF-16

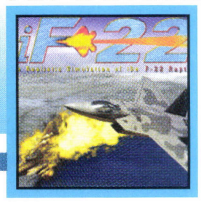
GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B+

B+ OVERALL

Take this F-16 for a test flight.

DEVELOPER:	Digital Integration
PUBLISHER:	Interactive Magic 800-559-0434
WEB:	www.imagicgames.com
PLATFORM:	DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P100, 16MB RAM, 32MB HD, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 104MB HD, SVGA, 4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ Resist the urge to fly high at full power and with your radar switched on. Remember, the F-16 is capable of nap-of-the-earth flight, and it can reduce its radar cross-section if it throttles down and only periodically enables its active radar. ▼ During the mission's ingress leg, you may need to rein in your wingmen. While an over-zealous nature is to be applauded, their aggressive stance can end up alerting virtually every SAM and AAA site within range of the objective.



iF-22

By Andy Mahood

With real-life military hardware falling out of the skies like ripe fruit these days, it's ironically fitting to run across a new combat flight sim that exhibits its own share of mechanical failures. If I were doing the selling, I might be tempted to place my tongue firmly in cheek and announce that the technical glitches associated with iF-22 were just a way of ensuring complete real-world authenticity.

This ain't no Adriatic vacation map.

The latest in a growing crop of F-22 flight simulators, iF-22 is an earnest attempt to bring computer jocks into an ambitious virtual environment involving America's newest air-superiority fighter. From the get-go, it's apparent that the environment in this two-CD product is a big one. The full-install option (complete with terrain sets) can usurp upward of 800MB of hard-disk space! It seems like just yesterday that we were loading games like Chuck Yeager's Air Combat from a single floppy.

The simulation's Bosnian and Ukrainian theaters were created using a terrain-mapping engine that combines satellite imagery with real-world elevation data. The end result is a remarkably detailed and complex 160,000-plus-square-mile hard deck that's almost completely devoid of any interesting landmarks. Coarsely drawn targets and airports are sprinkled liberally, but their cartoonish characteristics appear out of place in this lushly rendered (albeit sometimes mushy and patchy) terrain.

iF-22 boasts a dynamic mission/campaign system that generates random scenarios in your chosen theater of operation. In your role as flight leader, your missions are so randomized that it's entirely possible for friendly aircraft to have taken out your targets before you arrive. The game really shines here: An excellent communications system allows you to get AWACS information on bogeys or coordinate with ground assets to laser-designate targets for you. A comprehensive mission-planning screen gives you complete control over your own small role in the big war. Enemy AI is fully configurable for different skill levels, which is a good thing, considering your own wingmen are a pretty useless bunch. If I hear the message "my missile's gone stupid" one more time, I swear I'm gonna splash the pinhead that sent it—the hell with the court-martial!

The avionics and weapons-system management of the real F-22 are still highly classified, but I-Magic has produced a fairly credible theoretical flight model. The rapid-roll rate takes a little getting used to, and blackout/redout occurrences are way too premature, but the rest of the plane's behavior pays close attention to the laws of physics. The 177-page manual is top-notch, and an "active" cockpit, where virtually every single switch and button can be toggled with the mouse, is another useful plus.

Written specifically for Direct3D, iF-22 supports most 3D accelerator cards in resolutions as high as 1024-by-768. Unfortunately, configuring one's system to run the game can be a highly frustrating exercise. It took me over two hours of tweaking before I could even get it to run on my P133 with a Sierra Screamin' 3D accelerator card. Switching drivers finally got me going, but I've been forced to live with constant crashes, lockups, and jerky framerates ever since. Two different patches are already out—I'm not the only one to have suffered like this.

Although it's a well-intentioned game with solid play value and excellent multiplayer support (serial, modem, and network), iF-22 is still far too buggy to count as a serious contender in the competitive combat-sim genre. Like an exotic sports car that spends most of its time in the shop, it's unlikely to generate much in the way of customer loyalty, despite its sleek looks and powerful engine.

This Mig pilot never had a chance to hit the silk.

Friendly-fire casualty

The iF-22 3D model shows moving control surfaces.

iF-22

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	D-
GRAPHICS:	C-
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	C
MULTIPLAYER:	B+

Like Falcon 3.0 and EF2000, this is a game that might be great, once enough patches are applied.

PUBLISHER:	Interactive Magic 800-559-0434
WEB:	www.imagicgames.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 100MB HD, 1MB SVGA, 4X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 32MB RAM, 800MB HD(!), 800-by-600 SVGA
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ Make sure you have the most up-to-date video drivers for your system. It probably won't fix the hard-drive-access pauses and game crashes, but it may reduce them. ▼ Instruct your wingmen to take out targets from a safe distance (BVR). If their missiles "go stupid" as expected, send them home before they become casualties and impact the mission's success. ▼ When performing the weapons loadout on your plane, avoid placing any heavy ordinance on the wing hardpoints unless absolutely necessary. Carrying the big stuff inside the bay will allow you to maintain a stealthy RCS (radar cross-section) and lower drag coefficient. ▼ When an AWACS plane is available, turn off your active radar and let it track the bogeys for you (your stealth rating will improve even more). Even if there is no AWACS, you should use your active radar sparingly. ▼ Get the patch at **www.imagicgames.com** that offers a more realistic reduced-RCS function. (The real F-22 is purported to have an RCS less than one-thousandth that of an F-15!) This may make the game boring, though, as it's unlikely anyone will ever see or shoot at you.

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Warbirds 2.0

By Steve "PappyB" Klett

Warbirds received the *PC Games* Online Game of the Year award last year for the sheer numbers of people playing, sheer fun, and—most importantly—extremely solid online-game performance.

Since then, the game has undergone a series of minor upgrades, culminating in the major overhaul that's now Warbirds 2.0, which makes a serious bid to retain its online crown.

Warbirds is a totally online World War II flight sim—there's no stand-alone or boxed version to play. You can, however, fly around alone offline to get used to the airplanes' flight models, and 2.0 allows head-to-head play over the Internet, LAN, or modem. It offers 34 planes, each with a unique—and believable—flight model you'll need to master.

Flyin' high again

And that last point can't be stressed enough. This is a serious sim for serious PC pilots—newbies are welcomed, but it can take some time to become proficient. (I-Magic is readying a more accessible version called FighterOps, if realism ain't your thing.)

Features new to Warbirds 2.0 include a slick new mouse-driven interface, which replaces the kludgy command-based interface of old. New polygonal rolling terrain with new terrain graphics (better, but still not mind-blowing), sun glare, and other graphical effects such as realistic flak-bursts and haze improve the look. New airplanes (ME 110, Hurricane, ME 109E, Early Spitfire) have also been added. And voice technology allows you to talk to other players in the game. The addition of in-game help will also prove useful.

At press time, the Warbirds 2.0 server only offered three main arenas—each capable of supporting up to 200 players at once, though typically you'll find one with around 150 players, a second with 30 to 50, and the third empty.

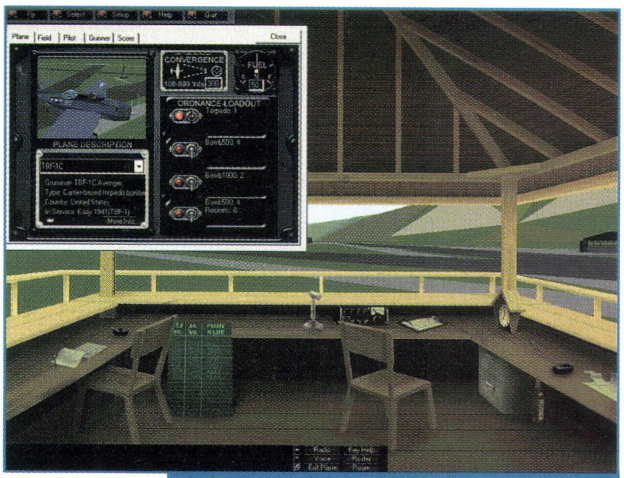
Each arena is a persistent universe, where a battle is always raging as long as people are logged in. (I've never logged in and not found enough people to make things interesting.) The terrain in the main arenas is a generic system of islands divided into four countries, designated by red, gold, purple, and green. You log in, choose a six-letter handle, a country, and a plane, then jump in the cockpit. Anyone flying with an icon that's not your country's color is fair game.

Your goal is to help win the war by totally eliminating other countries from the map. This is achieved by bombing the hell out of each enemy airfield, taking out its defenses, and then landing on its runway. Like a perpetual tug-of-war, the same airfields are continually gained and lost—battles can rage for days without any one side winning the war.

It may sound dull, when in fact it's anything but. You can fly heavy bombers such as the B-17, dive-bombers like the Dauntless and Kate, or classic fighters such as the Zero, P-38, FW190, and P-51. You can protect an airfield, escort a formation of friendly bombers, or dive-bomb an aircraft carrier—it's up to you. Don't want to fly? No problem: hop in a bomber and be a gunner.

The best thing about Warbirds 2.0 is that it performs well with older modems over ordinary phone lines. I play with a 28.8 from home and rarely have connection or latency troubles, which is tough to find in any other latency-dependent online game.

If you're a PC flight-sim junkie—and a fan of prop-driven warplanes—Warbirds 2.0 is the current online sim to fly.



Find out all about the strengths and weaknesses of each plane in 2.0's new interface.

The cockpit artwork, particularly in this Ju-88 bomber, is extremely detailed.

WARBIRDS 2.0

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	C+
SOUND CHECK:	B-

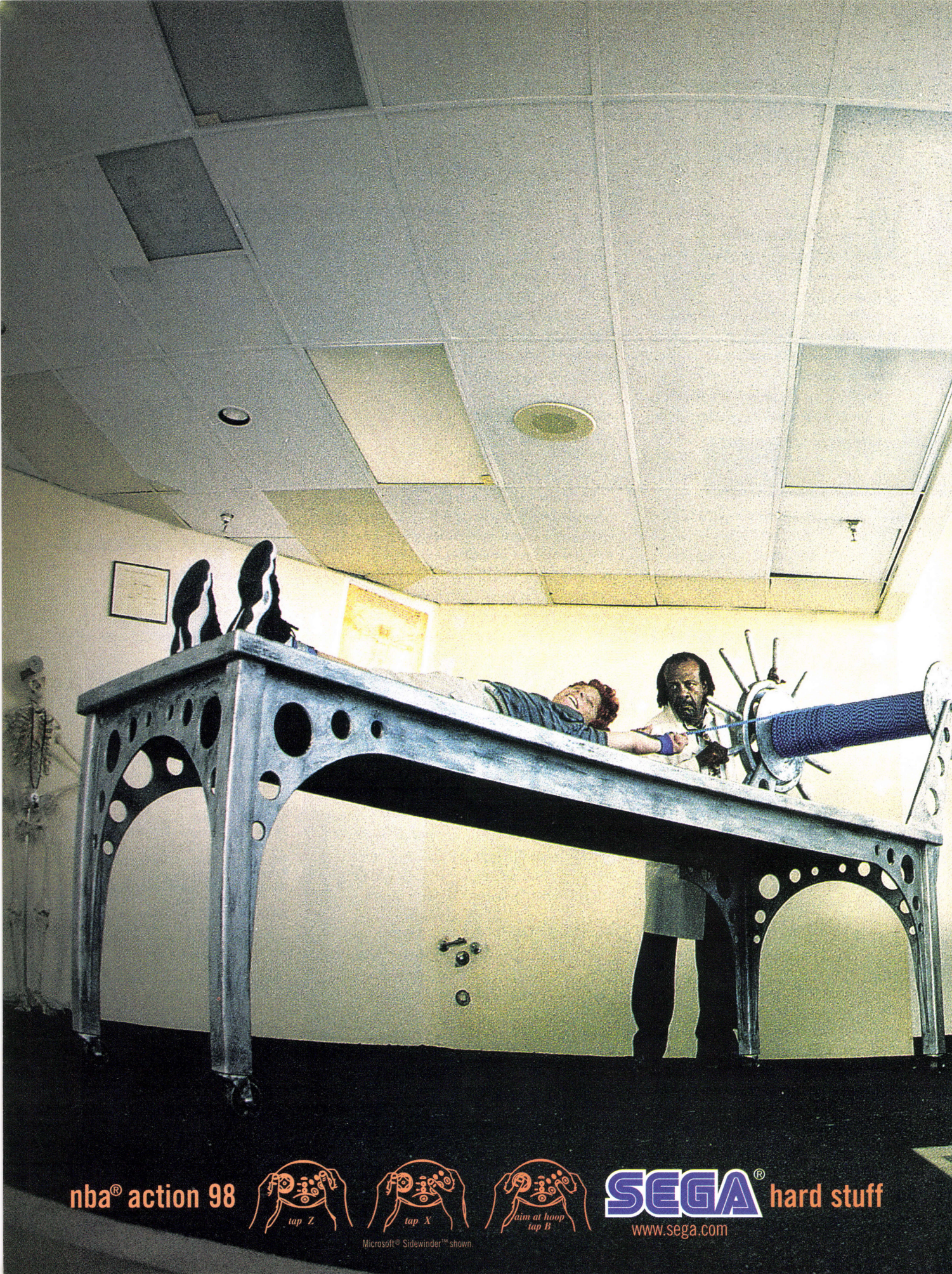
B+ OVERALL

Still the online flight-sim king.

DEVELOPER:	I-Magic Online
PUBLISHER:	Interactive Magic 800-789-1534
WEB:	www.imagiconline.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95/Mac
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 80MB HD, 9600 modem
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 28.8 modem, joystick w/ throttle and rudder pedals
STREET PRICE:	$2/hour; front-end software is a free download

TIPS ▼ Read the online manual and tips info, and practice offline before going into the arenas! Each online second costs you dough, so make it count! ▼ Start with the P-38 if you're new to flying—it's one of the most stable, and deadly, aircraft in the game. The Zero is also a good choice, but it's fragile. ▼ The FW190A-8 is one of the most deadly aircraft you can fly. Just don't get in a low-altitude turning fight—Boom and Zoom! ▼ Warn fellow country members when you see an enemy on their six, and always try to help friends under stress. ▼ Get involved! Warbirds is most fun when you cooperate with other pilots.

PLAY THE DEMO ON PC GAMES.EXE CD-ROM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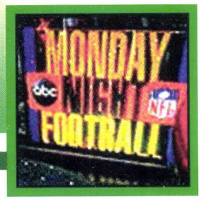


ABC's Monday Night Football '98

Go long

By Don St. John

"Are you ready for some football???"

Lambeau Field, home of so much of the history of the NFL. Good evening, I'm Frank Gifford, along with Al Michaels and Dan Dierdorf, and welcome to Monday Night Football. Tonight, we have a rematch of last year's Super Bowl, and it's set in a game that claims to offer players quite a lot. For more on the basic package, here's Al."

"Well, Frank, ABC Interactive's Monday Night Football '98 starts out with an easy, three-choice install that can be as low as 35MB or as high as 105MB. It did auto-install DirectX 5, we noticed—a 15-yard penalty in our playbook, and more given that it actually wiped out our 3Dfx-card drivers. Once you've got the game loaded and you've space-barred past Hank Williams and his annoyingly rowdy friends, we give you a control-room interface that lets you get to the various areas really easily. Want to hear us? Just click, or skip to the game if you don't. For more on the game, let's go to Dan."

"Al, this really is a simple interface. You'll choose your teams from here, and it's also where you go to edit the rosters. You can get weekly updates from Stats Inc. at the ABC Interactive Web site, too; we've found them to be a little slow in posting, but once you download them, they're easily imported. Set computer or player control at the team boxes, and right-click to find your preferred team.

"That's not all, either. At the bottom of the control room are panels that let you tool your joystick, weather control, and other options. This is where you'll also trigger Internet, modem, network, or Mplayer head-to-head play—but be warned that you have to right-click the phone icon to get these, not left-click. Audibles like this we don't need. Anyway, this is all that subtle wide-receiver stuff. I'll ask the lineman question: How does it play? Let's go back to an old-time receiver named Frank Gifford for the answer."

"Dan, it's like the guys in my era: This game goes both ways. If you want to dive in at the simplest levels, it's easy enough to do. You'll figure out basic play selection pretty intuitively, except for punting and kicking—you've gotta look in the Special section of the Play Caller for that. It's also retained the '96 version's ability to adjust a play on the fly by dragging the routes that are run, and even to audible after you look over the defense. Use the Play Creator to make up your own if you want to go beyond the plays the game provides. Of course, if you don't want to do any work, MNF has the standard CPU/CPU battles and quick-play leagues, based on the updated stats.

"But Monday Night should attract the serious statheads and stratheads, too. The coaching options are deep: You can adjust formations, re-weight your tendencies on either side of the ball, even reset your defensive bumps and stunts. You can edit and recast every team, down to individual player stats. You can change assignments in the middle of play with a right-click on a particular player. All of this is in play-call mode, and you don't always feel like you're controlling the play. But with a joystick or gamepad, you can boost the fun by going into action mode and moving your own players.

"So, the play is pretty decent. But does it *look* like football? How about it, Al?"

"Do you believe in miracles? This is a pretty decent-looking game. Camera angles abound, the stadiums have a fairly authentic feel to them, and the player movement is pretty realistic, too.

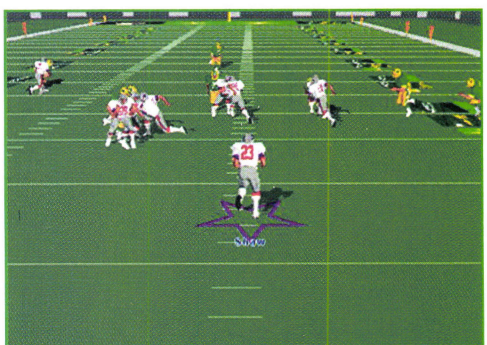
"Well, there you have it. This game got a time jump on Madden '98, and you've seen the huge promo blitz by now. The network play ought to be easier to find, given how important it is to the game, but otherwise, Monday Night carries the ball pretty solidly. And you don't even have to put up with Dierdorf and Berman if you don't want—"

"Hey!"

"Whoops! Go to intro segment again..."

"Are you ready for some football???"

From this panel, you control game options—and silence any announcer you want.



With a joystick or gamepad, *you're* the returner.

ABC'S MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL '98

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	C+
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B+

Strong enough for casual players, this should really appeal to hardcores.

DEVELOPER:	OT Sports
PUBLISHER:	ABC Interactive 212-456-7747
WEB:	www.abcinteractive.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P100, 16MB RAM, 35MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive, 2MB video card
RECOMMENDED:	73MB HD, 14.4 modem for Internet or modem play
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ Cheat. If you're playing the computer, check out the coaching tendencies on both sides of the ball and adjust your numbers accordingly. ▼ We had consistently good results running defensive stunts on the opponent's third-and-long. ▼ The middle gets crowded. If you're going to take a receiver in that way, run your tight end on an out to draw a linebacker away from the pile. Quick release helps out here, too. ▼ Tool the weather to your team's advantage. For example, the Packers are harder to beat at Lambeau if the conditions suck.

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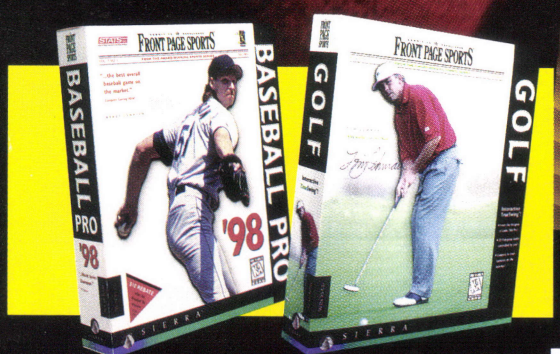

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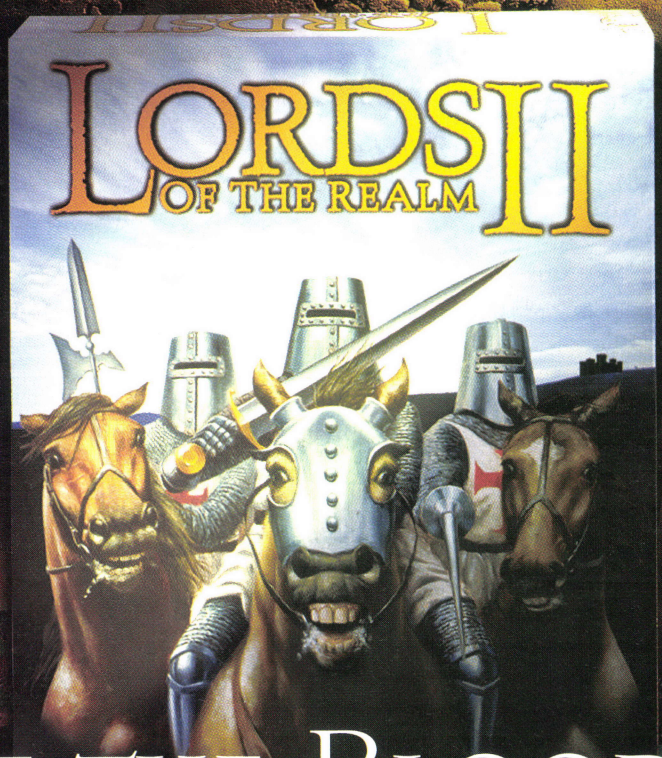

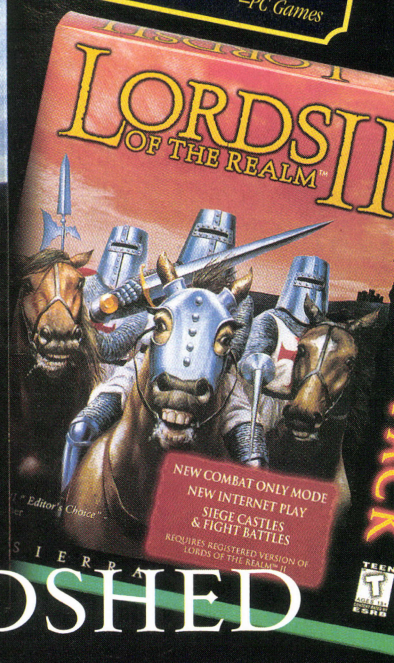

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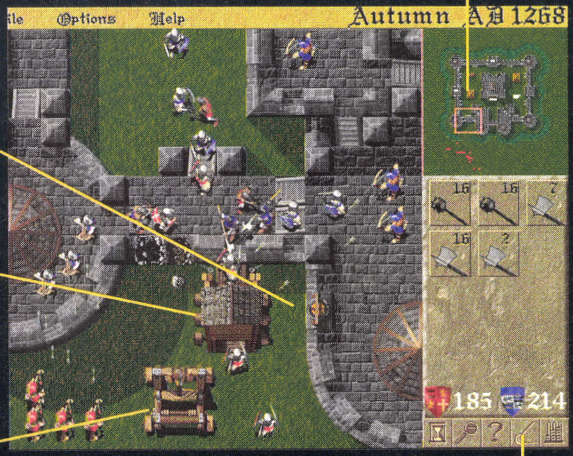

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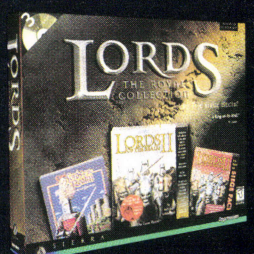

TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Impressions

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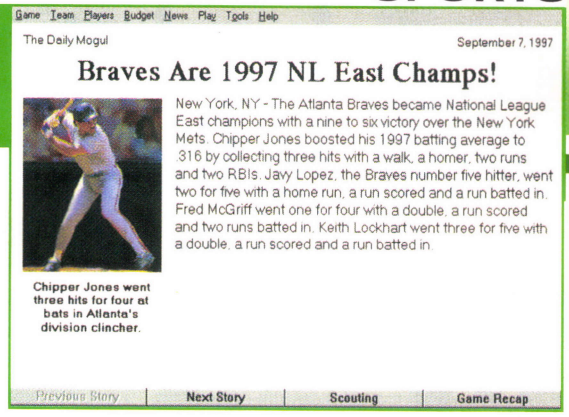
Baseball Mogul

The Daily Mogul keeps you updated on developments around the league, as well as the previous day's box scores.



Chipper Jones went three hits for four at bats in Atlanta's division clincher.

It's my daily ritual—pick up the morning paper, find the sports section, then rant and moan about every little thing the management of my favorite sports franchise did the previous day. Trades, free-agent signings, ticket-price hikes...

Now it's time to stop grousing and put yourself in the hot seat. Baseball Mogul offers one of the best statistical sports sims ever—manna for gamers (like me) who have always been disappointed by the lack of G.M./owner functions in sports games.

You take control of an MLB franchise (the players are licensed, but not the teams) with the task of steering it to championship—and solvency. Adjust concession and broadcast-license prices to boost your profits. Haggle with free agents over their contracts. Trade for young talent around the league. Develop minor-leaguers. Every facet of real-world baseball management is present and works, convincingly.

Who needs graphics?

The stats engine that drives the actual competition is nothing short of brilliant. Watch your games in play-by-play mode, and you're startled by the authenticity of the developments. As the season progresses, you'll notice when stars slump, when players hit hot streaks, when rookies start stepping it up a notch. You'll be spending hours poring over the stats breakdown of your club and its competition, looking for clues as to what move to make next. Is this shortstop prospect panning out, or should he be offloaded while you can still get something for him? Will he be punishing you in a few seasons for trading him?

You'll find out one way or the other, because Baseball Mogul is designed for extended, multi-season play. Starting a game means starting a regime, and you're operating on the level of dynastic control.

The graphical presentation is rustic but clean, with sound limited mostly to simple bat cracks and rustling crowd noise. It's nice, but silence wouldn't have bothered me. For hardcore baseball junkies with a desire to grab the business angle in both hands, Baseball Mogul is a must-own. Armchair G.M.s may never need another baseball game.

—Daniel Morris

BASEBALL MOGUL

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	C-
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

An excellent stat sim with a rewarding and replayable owner/G.M. package.

PUBLISHER:	Infinite Monkey Systems
WEB:	www.imonkey.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX/33, 8MB RAM, 8MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$40

NHL Open Ice

I'm sure that Big Head mode is exactly the tribute Mario is looking for before the Hall of Fame.

I love hockey. But someone finally managed to send me a "hockey" game that makes me vomit when I so much as smell ice.

NHL Open Ice arrived just as I was enjoying the start of a new NHL season. This sophomoric software soon snuffed out that brief glimmer of joy. Midway tried this trick before, when it ported the popular coin-op NBA Jam: after no more than 10 minutes, terminal boredom set in. Don't make the same mistake with NHL Open Ice.

Big-F mode

It's a two-on-two match-up, plus a "goalie," who's purely decorative. It's got power-ups, cheat patterns, big heads, baby heads, somersault shots, Jackie Chan leaping shots, whirlwind spinning hurricane shots, look-I-just-grew-to-twenty-feet-tall-now-I'm-taking-a-slapshot shots. And there's more: "He's on fire!"—turning your puck into a smoldering charcoal biscuit, igniting the net when you blow it by the prostrate, floundering "goaltender."

All the while, you'll be moaning, "Make the bad game *stop*."

You don't have an arcade-control setup. You've got your gamepad. Control's a lost cause. The game moves slowly on my P200. The goalies may as well not even be standing there, as goal scoring appears to be a completely random algorithm: Hmm, the CPU asks itself, does this puck phase through the goalie's body, or shall he remain solid for this shot?

On the plus side, there are some cute blondes who smile and wave in little windows. And also...well, actually, I guess that's it for the plus side.

I wonder if the NHLPA knew that it was licensing its superstars to a sports line that's founded on the belief that 9-year-olds are buying PC games. (No offense to any 9-year-olds reading this, but it's all your fault I have to review games like NHL Open Ice, ya dumb tykes.)

My simple advice re: NHL Open Ice is to avoid it like a Hanson brother. A preferable fate would be to lie down in the path of a Zamboni.

—The Grumpy Gamer

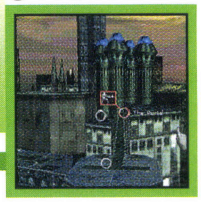
If you like The Grumpy Gamer, catch his weekly column at www.pcgames.com.

NHL OPEN ICE

GAMEPLAY:	F
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS :	D+
SOUND CHECK:	D
OVERALL	F
MULTIPLAYER:	D

This sucks pucks. Buy NHL 98 instead.

DEVELOPER:	Midway
PUBLISHER:	GT Interactive 800-610-4847
WEB:	www.gtinteractive.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P75, 8MB RAM, 55MB HD, 1MB PCI video card, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 16MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$50



Incubation: Time Is Running Out

Death on two legs!

By Marc Dultz

Combat, up close and personal.

1997 BEST OF THE BEST PC GAMES A-List BEST OF THE BEST

In the increasingly cluttered realm of strategy gaming, it's comforting to see that real gems can still occasionally be unearthed from the mounting pile of mediocrity. Take Incubation, a brilliant and amazingly flawless jewel of a game, blending the taut drama of man-to-man combat with the searing intensity of first-person action games.

Based loosely upon the Battle Isle series of turn-based wargames, Incubation—like X-COM and Jagged Alliance—takes a decidedly tactical approach, vividly portraying squad-based combat at its most ferocious. In this latest episode in the struggle to save a distant world, you command a squad of marines. The mission: to save a ravaged planet overrun by an insidious scourge. Evidently, a strange and incorrigible virus has infected the planet of Scayra, mutating the alien inhabitants into grotesque, barbarous monsters intent on sweeping the planet's surface like a plague.

Each squad member is afforded action points, used in various combinations to move, shoot, or conduct special actions.

The game begins on an ominous note. A squad of gung-ho marines lands on Scarya's surface and is quickly and mercilessly ambushed by waves of these repulsive beasts. Charged with investigating the troops' fate, you, commanding a small marine detachment, must follow the first team down to Scay-Hallwa, an infested industrial colony, and rid the dark, brooding environs of any remaining mutants.

Each side takes turns moving, shooting, and initiating special actions, such as healing or scanning the vicinity. In doing so, each team develops and employs sound tactics rooted in close cooperation, maximizing combined firepower while subjecting itself to the least possible risk.

Each marine is outfitted prior to each of the 30-plus missions as you deem appropriate, using weaponry and equipment purchased at upgrade centers. Not only must you be able to afford chosen items, but the soldier selected must possess the requisite skill-rating to use them. Skill is earned in the crucible of combat and based upon accumulated points garnered with every mutant killed.

Likewise, each marine's fighting strength improves once he's attained enough skill points, allowing him to conduct other important actions. Commendations and points are also awarded by squad leaders to marines for valorous service.

You must pay special attention to each marine's fatigue level and weapons effectiveness. A weapon can overheat or malfunction after prolonged use, while marines can rapidly become exhausted and lose vitality. Worse, marines can easily run out of ammo, something you really don't want happening in the middle of some monster-infested level.

What makes Incubation truly dynamic is how it employs various perspectives slaved to each soldier's line of sight. Click on a marine, and you can actually survey the area as the soldier sees it. Stare in awe as mutants vault over crates and land right in the midst of your tightly packed group. Cringe in fear as you helplessly watch a mutant creep up behind one of your unsuspecting troopers. You can also toggle between the free-floating camera angle and a less dramatic overhead view to watch the carnage from a more conventional standpoint.

At various stages in the game, you can give your squad members new weaponry and equipment.

Multiplayer options offer a classic one-on-one, good-guys-versus-mutant-bad-guys scenario over IPX networks or the Internet.

Incubation is without a doubt one of the most original and refreshing strategy games I've ever played. Essentially, what Command & Conquer did for real-time gaming, Incubation systematically achieves for the more pragmatic turn-based sect, demonstrating that ingenuity can sometimes sneak up and strike when you least expect it.

INCUBATION: TIME IS RUNNING OUT

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	A
OVERALL	A
MULTIPLAYER:	A-

Sets a new standard for turn-based strategy games.

PUBLISHER:	Blue Byte Software 800-933-2983
WEB:	www.bluebyte.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 70MB HD, 2MB SVGA, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 32MB RAM, 110MB HD
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ After your squad leader opens a door, place the remaining squad members off to either side of him to provide defensive fire, thwarting any looming ambushes. ▼ When firing at the mutants, switch from one member to the next to prevent weapon overheating and malfunction. ▼ Strive to keep your squad members together at all times. Not only does this tactic provide mutually supportive fire, but it prevents them from being picked off one by one. ▼ Rest and heal your soldiers at every opportunity. An alert soldier is more apt to score hits against the mutants when the action heats up again.

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Arena—Role Playing Game of the Year: Computer Gaming World, Computer Player, Game Machine, Games Magazine.

Daggerfall—Role Playing Game of the Year: Computer Gaming World, PC Gamer, PC Games, PC Today, CGDC Spotlight Award

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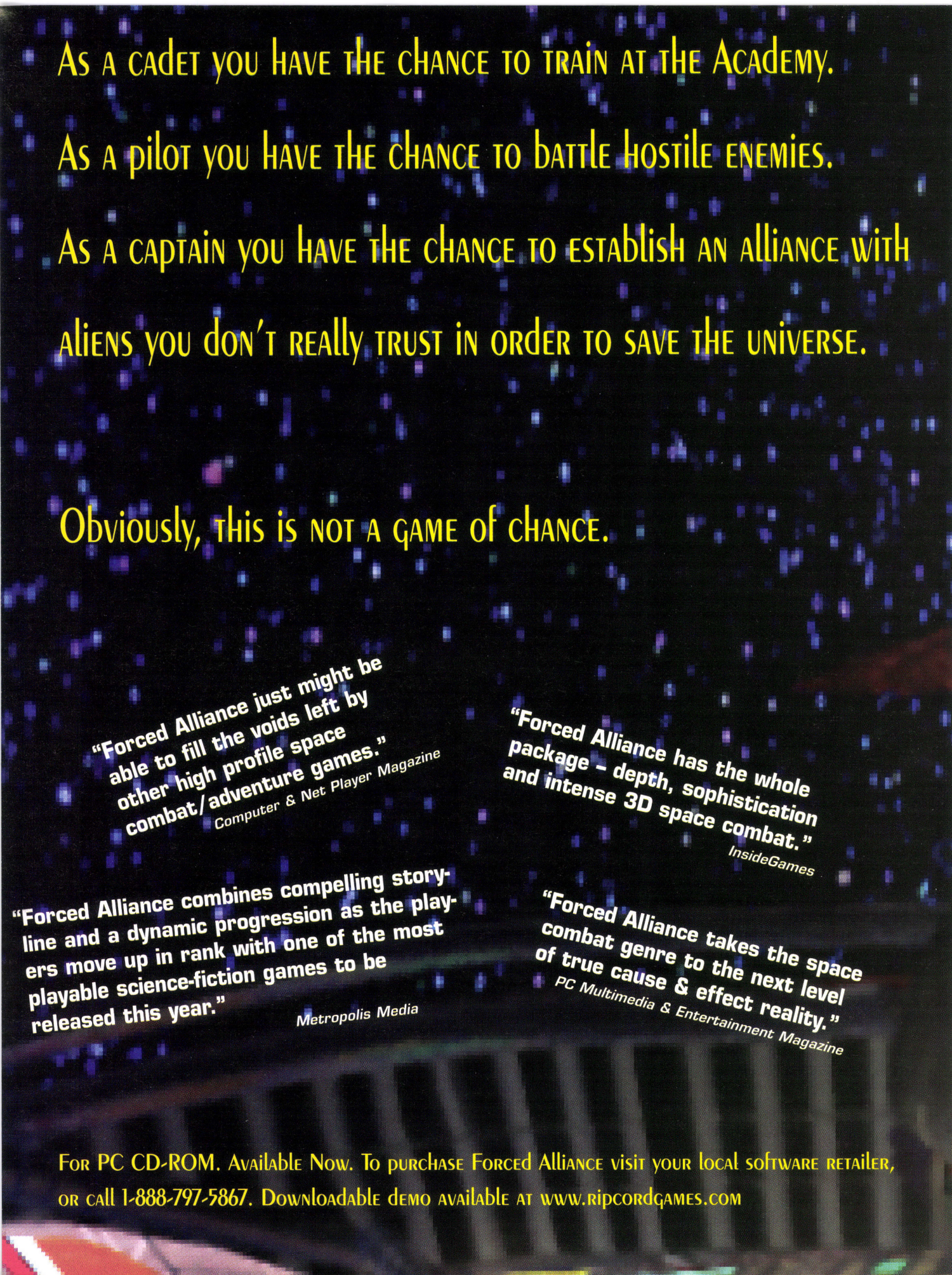
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Metropolis Media
"Forced Alliance takes the space combat genre to the next level of true cause & effect reality."
PC Multimedia & Entertainment Magazine
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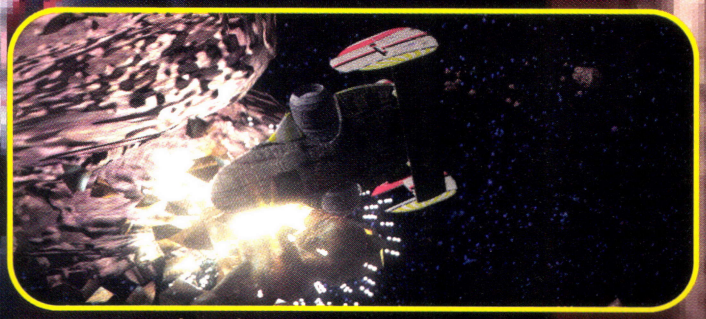
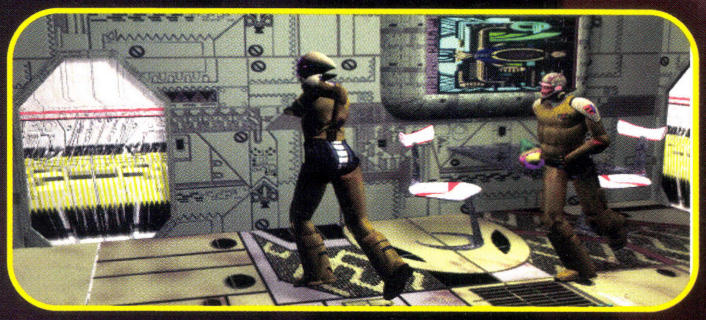
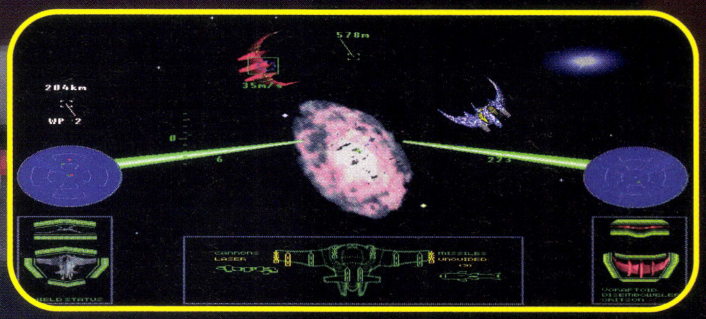
Forced Alliance



Consequence of Rank - As you progress from the rank of Cadet to Captain, you'll go from taking orders to giving them. The power & the responsibility of commanding an entire fleet of ships will be yours.



Consequence of Action - It's not just if you win or lose, or even how you play the game. Everything you do determines how the game is even played at all.



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A Thickening Plot - With an unparalleled depth of play, set against out-of-this-world SGI graphics, figure out a constantly changing story as you maneuver & master four fighters, while dealing with three different alien races.

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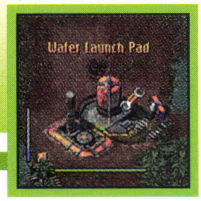

Dark Reign: The Future of War

By Peter Olafson

With the intuitive interface, you can set orders, unit behavior, level of independence, and the amount of damage a unit is prepared to take before returning to base.

Better than your average clone

These days, we're seeing less original game design and more "featurization" of established concepts. Gamemakers look at what's popular (Quake, Myst, SimCity) and brainstorm: "What can we do to make it different?" And it's by those differences that games often live and die.

Dark Reign should live. It's a more-than-decent real-time strategy game whose makers seem to have caught the featurization bug—to mixed (but generally positive) effect.

There's nothing wrong with the game proper, except that (apologies to David Spade) the basic gameplay hasn't advanced much from a couple of years ago, when it was called Command & Conquer. It's playable, it's challenging, it doesn't have many irritating quirks, and it's fun.

The game finds you controlling either the Imperium or the rebels of the Freedom Guard as they perform the usual pyrotechnical dance over 30-plus missions. Typically, you'll erect a base of the usual sorts of buildings; collect resources (two types this time); create as many as 35 types of units (with up to 10 in the construction queue at a time); and send 'em out to shoot the hell out of the other fellow.

Nothing much new there, to be sure. But the graphics are solid—not quite as rich as Dark Colony's, but without the occasional Hall of Justice cartooniness of 7th Legion. The missions are designed in a pleasantly open fashion that's neither too broad nor too gimmicky—they're good strategy missions—and the AI is always probing and prodding the player in interesting ways. There's an increasing sense of an intelligent presence—one that came through violently when the rebels hit my young base in exactly the right place and sequence. I got slaughtered, and I deserved it.

Right then, I could've sworn I was playing with another person.

Landscapes vary as the storyline advances the Imperium/Freedom Guard clash.

The emphasis on new features/same framework evidently weighed on the designers' minds, since four well-detailed tutorial missions introduce all the non–real-time-strategy elements, such as waypoints, damage assessment, and configurable AI parameters for each unit. Some of the new inclusions are right on the mark. Dark Reign comes with a mission editor, which immediately puts it on high ground relative to much of the competition. (Caveat: I started getting error reports upon re-entering the game after playing around with the editor—without having actually done any editing, mind you. The problem cleared up once I rebooted.)

The multiplayer version (for as many as eight via LAN) is pleasantly full-featured. It isn't simply another raucous free-for-all: there's an alliance option, with resource- and knowledge-sharing, and the games can be played over Activision's dedicated servers. (The problem for me was maintaining a reliable connection. I kept getting dumped.)

And you'll want to read the well-bound 117-page manual to learn about a host of little conveniences wrapped into the interface. For example, a tap on the space bar takes you to the location of the last game event, hitting Tab places the waypoint markers for selected units, and so on.

On the other hand, I had little luck persuading the

Stacking units to be built is incredibly simple. A small number on the build menu indicates how many units are being readied.

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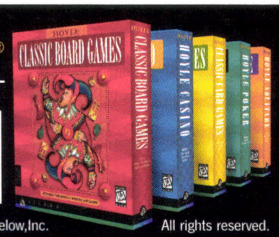

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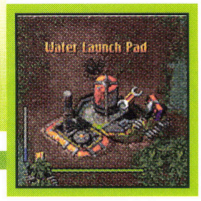


"upgrade unit" gadget to work. (Hey, maybe it's me, but if this feature doesn't work in some missions, shouldn't the game tell you so outright?) The AI's flame seems to flicker, too—I've noticed enemies standing right next to my laser turrets to no apparent effect—and resource freighters seem to get confused occasionally. And the game's far too slow to identify units highlighted in the construction menu.

Furthermore, it seems like when they sent the secretaries home, ordered out for Chinese, and put their feet up on the big table, the designers made some rather odd choices for features—things that may have sounded "cool" in isolation, but don't add much to gameplay.

The prison break mission requires a careful plotting of the route to ensure the maximum number of friendly units are liberated.

Use elevations in the terrain to get the best line of sight for some of the powerful turrets.

For instance, the ability to set up a basic AI and waypoints for my units wouldn't have been high on my list. Oh, it's very cleanly implemented, requiring only a few intuitive clicks, and it's certainly convenient for things like scouting (other options are harass and search-and-destroy), where you don't necessarily want to handle the units in detail. But I found most scenarios too close of a contest to throw away many units on nonspecific tasks. Why wasn't this tied into the game's core AI? If you know the map, shouldn't your units know it as well?

Likewise, the specialization in personnel units is nice—I especially like the Infiltrator, who can swipe plans from the enemy HQ—but I suspect most people won't use units like Field Medic, Mechanic, and Saboteur until mission requirements absolutely force them to. There's simply too much going on here for much in the way of micro-management; in fact, it might've been nicer if these units had been made more autonomous. And how can you have 35 unit types, including air and artillery, and overlook water-borne units?

I suppose it's nice to be able to choose either side in a mission, rather than having to follow a given track. But am I likely to switch sides after I've already chosen the rebels? I don't think so. I want to follow the story, not toy with it.

For all those features, Dark Colo—er, Dark Reign—is still another you-know-what, and I'm getting a bit tired of playing you-know-whats. A borrowed concept needn't prevent you from enjoying Dark Reign, like I did, but a fresh outlook wouldn't hurt.

Can't see the wood for the trees? It's certainly difficult to see individual units under cover. You can also hide large numbers of infantry, with careful formation planning.

Dark Reign Beats Total Annihilation on...

- Artificial intelligence
- Level design
- Clever little features (waypoints, unit behavior, damage assessment)

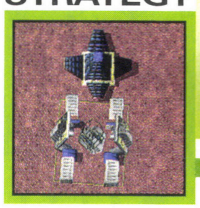
DARK REIGN: THE FUTURE OF WAR

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	B+

All those features add up to plenty of variation and pretty strategic battles.

DEVELOPER:	Australis
PUBLISHER:	Activision 800-477-3650
WEB:	www.activision.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 130MB HD, 1MB video card, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 32MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ Some of the real-time maxims seem to hold here. The wall-of-turrets defense has worked since Dune 2, and it's just as devastatingly effective here. (Nevertheless, keep a tank or two on guard duty within the base proper, as the enemy will occasionally rush through the line and get a unit or two in position to do damage.) ▼ The so-called "tank rush"—in which a large formation of tanks overwhelms an enemy base—doesn't seem as reliable and tends to get cut up in skirmishes en route.



Total Annihilation

King of the clones

By Peter Olafson

This review of Total Annihilation is a bit late. My editors won't be happy. But I have a classic explanation: I got stuck in traffic.

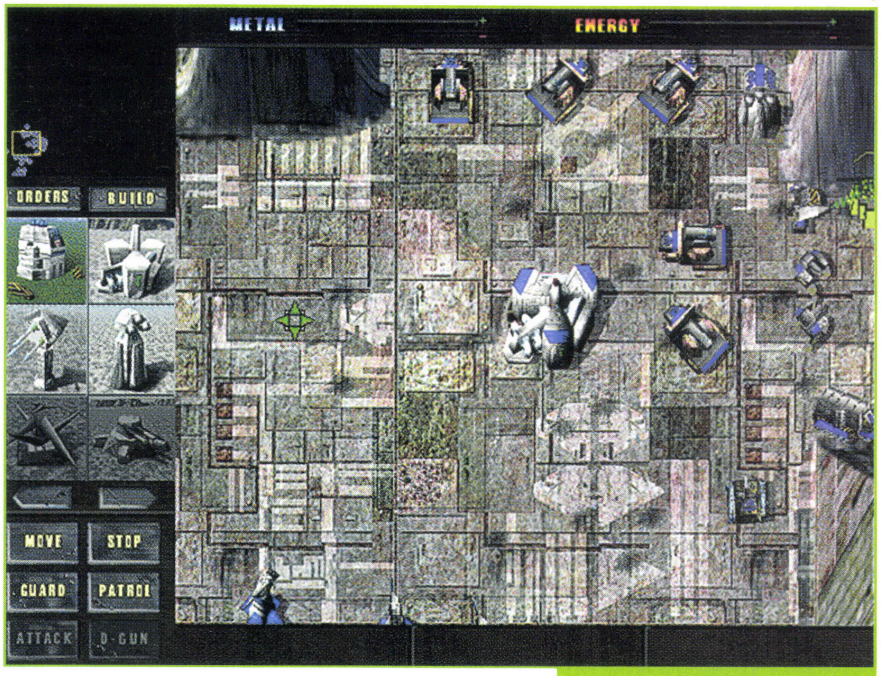
It's this way: In most real-time strategy games, a destroyed unit vanishes as though it never existed. At best, it leaves behind a nasty scorch mark. (Dark Reign's surface can't be damaged, and units in 7th Legion leave behind some crinkly metal bits.)

Total Annihilation—Cavedog Entertainment's large, lovely, and lunatic exploration of the real-time strategy game (RTSG) ethos—is a charming exception.

The only thing that changes when a unit is destroyed is its shape (it contorts) and color (to a silvery lead). But otherwise, it sits where it died, until it's destroyed during subsequent battles or reclaimed for its metal by your commander or a construction unit.

Needless to say, this leads to a lot of dead equipment lying around. Hence, the traffic jam. I had to send out units on reclamation missions to clear a path by harvesting scrap metal before I could even think of attacking the enemy base. It was like being in some sort of post-apocalyptic movie.

Now, I like this for all sorts of reasons. I like it because it preserves a record of the game's history. (What kind of battle leaves behind an empty field?) I like it because it looks different from 95 percent of the games in this over-exploited genre. I like it because it's a better integrated, more realistic way of handling resource management. In real-world armored battles, possession of the battlefield is itself counted as a victory.



This is called "over-defending."

And, hey, I happen to *like* recycling.

TA is the first RTSG I've played in months that didn't feel as though it had been assembled with a copy of C&C and a wish list. I'm not going to say that the build-and-burn game mechanics aren't predictable. They are: if you can play C&C, you can play this. And Total Annihilation is what it is.

But the game also has a surprising freshness. It's almost as though the genre is new all over again.

How exactly did this happen? I'm not quite sure. To be honest, I've been too busy enjoying myself—and nursing a behind still sore from a kicking—to dissect Total Annihilation's success. And I'm not persuaded that you can break this exciting experience up into nice, edible chunks for public consumption. But simply put: If you liked C&C, you will love this particular game.

But let's start with how it looks: The first thing you'll notice about this 50-mission epic—set during a galactic, eons-old war between Core and ARM—is its modeled terrain. This isn't a usual flat you-know-what variant with polite cliffs and rivers. This is a 2D/3D game. The bluffs, the dusky hills, the Death Star–ish metallic abutments surge up off the screen and provide a vigorous sense of volume and dimension.

The game is large in obvious ways—the maps are huge, and TA has some 150 buildings and units—but also in subtle ones. Your troops, which function on land, in the air, and on water, aren't simply in the game. Given the impression of depth here, it's like they're in a well. I think that's why I initially played with a kind of hand-wringing defensiveness. Call me a nut, but I think, in some private way, I was worried for them.

The first few ARM missions are set in this lush countryside. Here, my lead unit takes point-blank aim at a Core tanker...

A reward for work well done.

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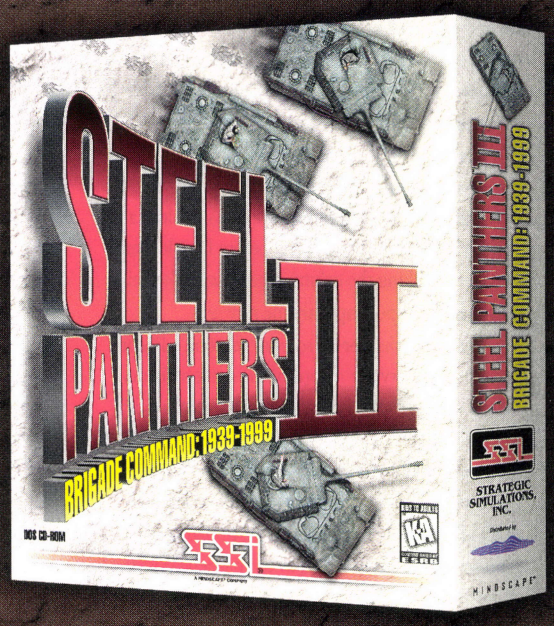

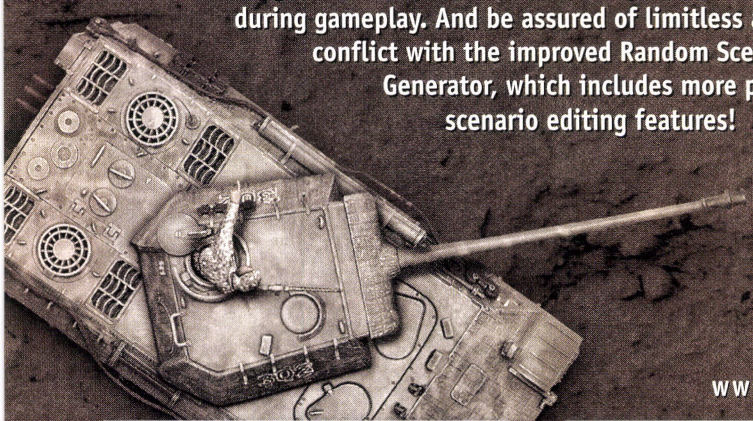

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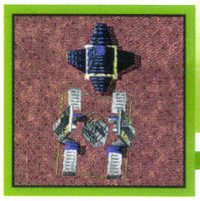
KIDS TO ADULTS K-A CONTENT RATED BY ESRB



...while the rest of the gang beats up on the next in line. Only you can start forest fires!

I suspect that freshness also has something to do with the lack of a command center. In most you-know-whats, that's the necessary, basic structure from which all good militaristic things flow. Here, the closest thing to that concept is your mobile commander—creator, grabber of waste metal, repairer of broken buildings, last line of defense. It's not the traditional docile structure but an active, controllable unit, and its presence (though it sometimes seems to be usurped by other units in the course of play) strikes a blow for interactivity.

I told you the explosions were slick.

And maybe a little bit of the game's freshness lies in its explosions. I've seen so many units blowing up that it's hard to get excited about yet another fiery mushroom cloud. But the detonations in TA play off our expectations. The standard, nondestructive blast is what we'd expect when a unit goes to hell in another game; but TA's roiling white flash of death still makes me look up. It's at once a sight and a relief. (Er, unless that was one of my units.)

Now, I know I could go on and mention such-and-such a feature (as thoroughgoing an approach to multiplayer gaming as I've seen) or thus-and-so a plan (new units available for download on a weekly basis, which could do for RTSGs what Quake/QuakeC did for shooters in the longevity stakes) or this or that unit (aircraft carrier!).

But I should mention the few little odd things that bugged me about the game while I was playing it. For example, I would have preferred not to micromanage the resource collection so much, and the AI was occasionally unpredictable.

Consider: In one early Core mission, I decided to imitate my attacker and hand out some of the same punishment-from-on-high that I was taking at my base. I perched a couple of missile towers on a high ledge across from the ARM base—just far enough back from the edge to make them hard to hit from the trough below. They weren't even in place when enemy units began showing up at the base of the wall.

A briefing screen. Someone who sounds like Patrick Stewart gives all your instructions.

No big deal in itself. But the relative invulnerability of the towers—incoming fire tended to detonate at the precipice—seemed to drive the ARM AI into a kind of obsessive frenzy. It sent dozens of units to the wall, and the resulting conflagration was such that it slowed down my 64MB P200 MMX: units swarmed around each other like ants, explosion upon explosion, wreckage upon wreckage upon wreckage.

I heard the distant ruckus and stopped building units to watch. It was like watching an elaborate accident unfold, and—while I don't put computer-game memories up there with real-life ones—I don't think I'll forget this. This was an event.

And you wouldn't believe the traffic afterward.

Total Annihilation Beats Dark Reign on...

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- Multiplayer options
- Special sound effects
- Graphics realism
- Sheer daunting size

TOTAL ANNIHILATION

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS :	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	A-
MULTIPLAYER:	A-

The leader of the pack.

DEVELOPER:	Cavedog Entertainment
PUBLISHER:	GT Interactive 800-610-4847
WEB:	www.cavedog.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P100, 16MB RAM, 35MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 24MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ It's easy to feel intimidated as Core in Enough is Enough. An early thrust forward to take the nearby thermal vent and set up a defensive line may bring the wrath of heaven down on your head. ▼ Your best bet is to build up your forces without giving ARM any tempting targets. (Stay away from the gun emplacements on its southwest perimeter.) Once you've built an advanced vehicle factory, you're over the first hump.

7th Legion

By Peter Olafson

Now, what happened here?

The towers. (One down, one to go.) We've used a battle card to take control of an enemy unit—which has just reached the end of its useful life.

When I previewed 7th Legion about a year ago, this action-oriented real-time strategy game looked like a shooting star. Minimized resource management. Power-ups. Spiffy units and explosions. A happy immediacy that promised a lively and clever variation on the then-germinal trend of, uh, ripping off Command & Conquer.

7th Legion still exhibits some of that immediacy and cleverness, but a lot of real-time water has passed under the bridge since that alpha version. In this Year of the C&C Clone, the final product has, I confess, a whiff of the ordinary about it.

Set in Earth's distant future, the story pits those left behind on the dying planet hundreds of years ago (represented by the strongest of its once-warring legions) against The Chosen (the best and brightest who went off to settle the stars and have returned).

The bulk of the fighting is handled outdoors, C&C-style...

The upside: This isn't simply C&C with new fuzzy dice and a vinyl steering-wheel cover. Developer Vision Software (which made a name for itself with Amiga games like Seek & Destroy and Woody's World) has clearly tried to address some of the traditional weaknesses in real-time strategy games, and has succeeded—at least conceptually.

So, for example, the game features battle cards that remove the element of certainty (i.e., a superior force in arms will usually prevail) that's always dogged this genre. As wild as this feature can make things, the 52 cards, from unit killers to money stealers to card swappers, have been balanced carefully so as not to destroy the game's core strategic element. Think of them as air strikes, but with a creative twist.

I also like the promotions. Units typically have no history, no distinction, no prospects beyond the next meat-grinder battle. 7th Legion gives you a reason to keep them alive: An experienced unit is a stronger unit. I made it through one particularly difficult mission with a surviving quartet of tankers—weak in terms of remaining strength, but elevated in rank and therefore in ability.

Nor is that the least of the features. You'll appreciate the ability to ascribe one of three behaviors to a unit or set of units, and to create preset unit detachments, which can be activated with a key-press.

But I found myself wishing Vision had paid as much attention to the underlying game and its mechanics. Many of the 40 missions lacked the kind of telling detail that makes for immortality, tending instead toward wipe-out-the-other-base excursions or conundrums keyed to a certain trick or gimmick. The enemy AI has a tendency to send in its forces piecemeal, rather than in coordinated, multi-unit assaults.

I also found the interface rather clumsy overall. Sometimes I couldn't tell if an order was received; other times units acted without my order. If my enemy's playing some battle card I haven't read about, I'd like it to be made a little clearer what's happened than via some light-colored text at the top and bottom of the screen.

The line-of-sight rules are rather strange: your units are allowed to see enemies that the player cannot, and terrain you've uncovered vanishes into darkness again if it remains idle for a period of time. (OK, I'll bite: Why?) The units also don't seem quite connected to the ground, seeming instead to skate and slide.

...but some missions take place in buildings.

And perhaps unconnected is an apt word for 7th Legion. Feature for feature, this is a respectable effort, but those features seem to be treading water in a game that doesn't quite do them justice.

7TH LEGION

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	C
MULTIPLAYER:	B

C+ OVERALL

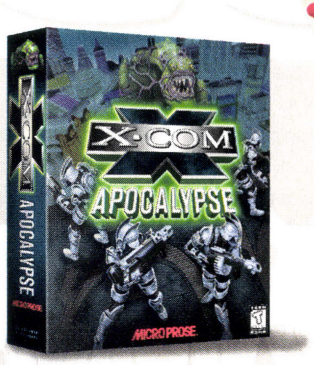
Somehow it manages to just miss the mark.

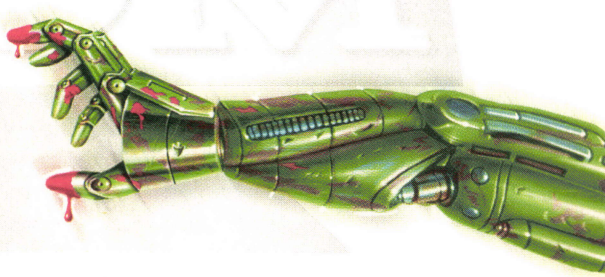
DEVELOPER:	Vision Software
PUBLISHER:	MicroProse 800-695-4263
WEB:	www.microprose.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P100, 16MB RAM, 15MB HD, 2MB video card, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 28.8 modem
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ The first tricky mission is the fourth—a murderous affair in which you have to rescue some captured bots from an enclosure to the northeast, then mop up remaining enemy forces. The terrain en route guides your units into a defile between two deadly turrets that'll require some positioning finesse to take out. ▼ The "mop-up" operation requires taking out an enemy base—and you don't have one of your own. The key here is to sacrifice nothing: save after each leg of the mission, let your tankers knock down the enclosure's walls to build experience, and keep your few cards for key encounters.

heroin
s & m
unfiltered cigs
binge drinking
creamed corn
one night stands

hell, what's left?





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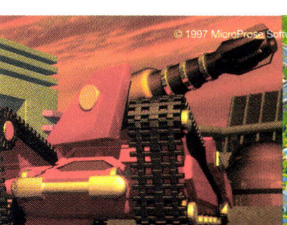
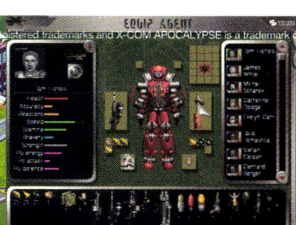
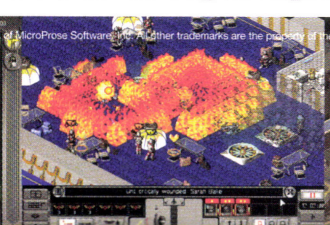
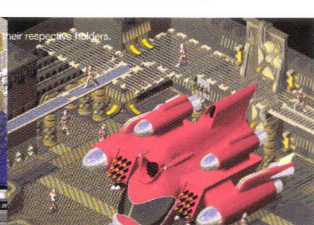


Age of Empires

By Bob Lindstrom

Enter the Cool Age

If they threw a toga party in the Command & Conquer barracks, it might look a lot like Age of Empires, Ensemble's ancient-world entry into this Christmas' glut of real-time strategy games. Today's imitative interactive industry quickly saw the commercial triumph of C&C and Warcraft II as an invitation to "Come in and copy." So, this holiday season we're getting real-time Earth invasions, real-time post-apocalyptic disasters, and real-time realtime in really realistic real time. But Age of Empires is a little different.

Prepare unwisely, and your capital city will be overrun.

Fleets are relatively cheap and quick to build, and can wreak havoc along coasts.

Much of the thanks can be laid at the feet of designer Bruce Shelley, a codesigner with Sid Meier of MicroProse's grand strategic masterpiece Civilization. By integrating the cultural/social simulation of Civilization into the real-time strategy genre, Empire goes far beyond little electronic soldiers. It acquires play depth, epic scope, and a fascinating historical authenticity that eludes the real-time competition.

Age focuses on the beginnings of civilized man, a period of 12,000 years after the Ice Age. The player chooses to command one of 12 ancient cultures—from Babylon and Greece to Sumer and Yamato—that emerged in the Mediterranean and Far East. As a credit to the rich atmosphere that Age of Empires manages to achieve in evoking the ancients, the first time you see an elephant grazing through the landscape, it's comparable to sighting a UFO.

You get to oversee a culture's growth from the Stone Age, through the Tool Age, and into the Bronze and the Iron Ages. In single-player games, the computer controls the other societies. Solo players will probably begin by taking on a Campaign, a selection of related scenarios that together illustrate the actual historical progress of an individual civilization. Goals in each scenario are very specific and linear: create seven citizens, discover five locations of "wonder," build a granary and a dock.

The influence of Civilization will become clear when you challenge your first Random Map. While you can modify the basic rules and choose the victory condition—ranging from conquering all enemies to controlling all ancient ruins—that is the extent of the structure. The rest is up to you. Do you become a force in trade? A military superpower? A center for intellectual and cultural exchange? In this freeform experience, the strategy is purely up to you; though the other cultures will also be pursuing their own paths, sometimes to your detriment.

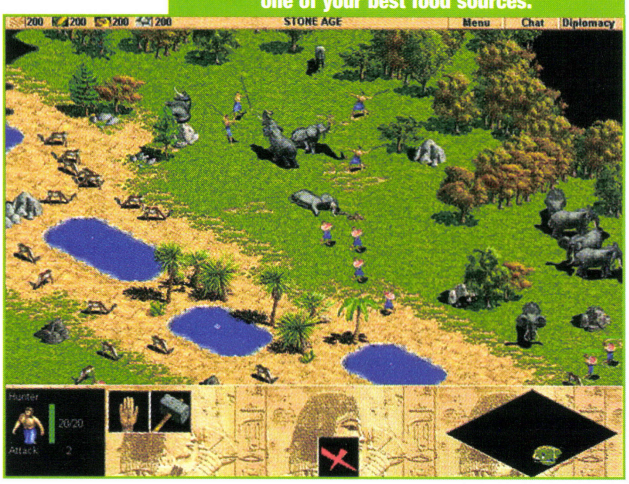
Age is also lavishly produced. With resolutions up to 1024-by-768 and crowds of animated citizens roaming the map on their daily activities, the graphics are state-of-the-art for real-time strategy games. As a civilization grows, so does the visual spectacle, with extravagant cities and animated troupes. The only thing missing is true 3D terrain.

The sound effects go from being irritating (as in Warcraft, the characters bark to acknowledge every command) to functional—such as the exhale that connotes the arrival of a newly created citizen, or the horn fanfare that indicates a conflict somewhere on the map. The excellent, understated CD music also lays down an audible atmosphere of antiquity.

But pretty as it is, there are some AI problems. The algorithm that controls movement around obstacles imposes pure stupidity on some of the citizenry, who can't figure out how to walk around a bush, so they ping-pong between two insignificant objects while their colleagues are crushed by an approaching foe.

Your military forces' AI can also sometimes prove a bit dubious. If a soldier sees an enemy in his area that the others don't see, he may split off and begin fighting. While this can be all to the good, it can leave an individual soldier as easy, solitary prey

Food surpluses are critical to funding your cultural advancements, and elephants provide one of your best food sources.



Building a wonder can win you the game. But build it too close to the water and someone will knock it down.

Multiplayer Through the Ages

Age of Empires really comes into its own when played against other humans via a LAN or on the Internet Gaming Zone.

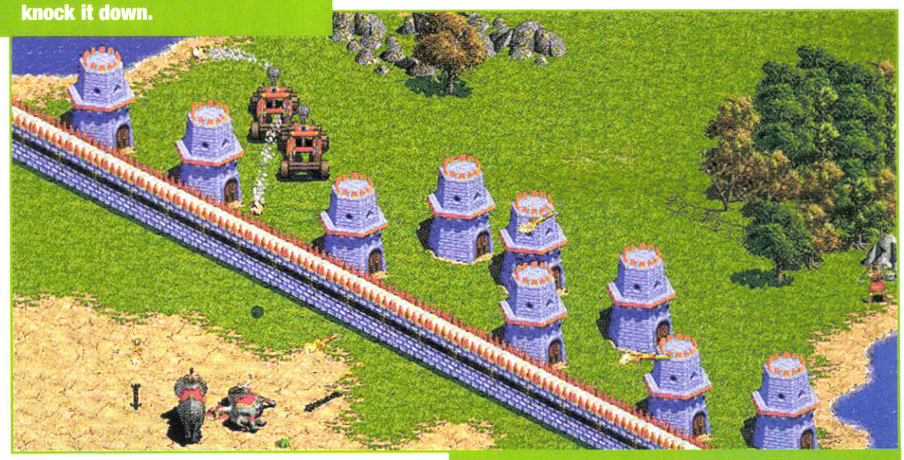
Up to eight would-be emperors start their games at the Ice Age, or any age up to the Iron Age. The latter is extremely useful when you want to get the battle rolling without spending the two hours–plus to build up your civilization from scratch.

In deathmatch mode, everyone starts out with an extended set of resources and the ability to immediately build their best units for defense or attack, creating more balanced armies. Starting from scratch allows bum-rush attacks by other players who concentrate only on axemen or scouts. You can also share resources in team matches.

Multiplayer Age of Empires promotes thinking about long-term strategy. To build a wonder, get good defensive units and structures to protect what you build. Choosing the Babylonians is a good move because their towers can take more damage and have larger hit points, and their walls are tougher as well. If you want to win by collecting all the artifacts, the Yamato have fast heavy cavalry that can go out and steal artifacts other players have stockpiled. Meanwhile, if conquest is your thing, the Persians and their heavily armored war elephants are very effective when supported by siege catapults.

The 50-unit limit in random and deathmatch games is a real downer (Ensemble was worried about choppy gameplay on slower systems playing on Age's incredibly large maps): Be prepared to kill off some villagers when it comes time for war. When you reach your limit, use the priests to convert some villagers belonging to a neighbor. A lesser evil in the game is that the available amount of stone and gold is extremely limited compared to wood and food. In the later ages, stone and gold get used up too quickly. While you can build a trading ship, sneak to a neighbor's dock, and exchange food, stone, or wood for gold, there's no way to trade for stone. One last warning: Once resources are used up, that's it—there's no new growth. So consume wisely.

—George T. Chronis



If the landward approaches to your empire are narrow, you can keep the computer from bum-rushing you.

without any backup—until you've spotted the behavior and send his colleagues for him. For the sake of expediency, you can group units (à la C&C) to get the backup on the move more swiftly. But you'll spend a fair amount of time just getting used to the strange behavior and interface quirks. In the earlier Ages, it can also be tricky to see at a glance who your warriors are and who your workers are, respectively.

The nagging question that Age presents, though, is whether a veteran Civilization player will cotton to the tactical-level activity. Or if a fan of the Warcraft fantasy or C&C militarism will get his head into the more varied and subtle challenges of Age's socio-cultural simulation. My guess is that newcomers will probably find Age of Empires an excellent "in" to the world of cultural simulations.

Priests can convert units and buildings, making them useful weapons if you can park them behind strong defenses.

Initially, veteran Civ players may find the Campaigns and scenarios too simplistic and linear to be satisfying. They'll more likely move to the freeform challenge of Random Maps and multiplayer Internet games.

Age of Empires is a successful combination of real-time and grand strategic challenges in SVGA splendor. The weaknesses of character movement and some obscure interface decisions will spell frustration for some players. But the persistent strategist will be rewarded by an exciting experience that seamlessly blends long-range planning with edge-of-your-seat timing.

AGE OF EMPIRES

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	C
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	A-

Bisecting socio-cultural and real-time strategy creates a beautifully presented, intriguing option in this crowded market.

DEVELOPER:	Ensemble Studios
PUBLISHER:	Microsoft 800-426-9400
WEB:	www.microsoft.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 80MB HD, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 4x CD-ROM drive, 14.4 modem for Internet play
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS

▼ In the opening game, move as rapidly as possible to gather food and create new workers in the Stone Age. Here's the chance to build a population, with little or no interference from the outside. ▼ Each of the 12 civilizations you can command has its own strengths and weaknesses. Plan your growth strategy to play to the strengths. ▼ Although the scenario may not stress military might, start growing an army when you arrive in the Tool Age. Random invaders won't be far behind. ▼ Split your military forces to provide more attack variety. A line of archers can be a powerful deterrent, but two groups of clubmen approaching from different directions may be more effective than a unified mob of soldiers. ▼ Group units (use CRTL-<number key>) to effectively control your forces. Otherwise, you'll be wasting time scanning your map for individuals. ▼ The game's printed and electronic documentation reproduces the technology trees for moving into the Bronze and Iron Ages. Study them carefully to develop a sharply aimed strategy. Avoid random, spur-of-the-moment strategic decisions unless the competition forces you into them.

The Tone Rebellion

By Barry Brenesal

Weird is good

A Cephean Stormer dojo unleashes lightning. Each tribe's spellcaster learns different spells at various levels.

1997 PC GAMES A-List

It began with Dune 2, though Command & Conquer quickly took over the lead. Since then, we've had entire battalions of C&C clones marching over our computers. Is it possible to produce another real-time strategy game with only fighting/working units and structures, while avoiding mind-numbing ennui?

After playing The Tone Rebellion, I'd say yes. In many ways standard C&C, it's still got enough graphical panache and fanciful imagination to remain extremely enjoyable.

The setting is a distant planet where worker and fighter clans live by nurturing and harvesting Tone. It's used to create buildings, power spells, and nourish the environment. Then the Leviathan appears within a Tone node (a pool, to you Earthling scum) and infects the entire Tone supply, spreads his minions, and splits the place into 15 densely packed island asteroids.

Your task is to guide a small tribe of floaters back to victory by conquering 14 of the islands. Along the way, you'll locate 28 artifacts which, installed in their proper mystical places, grant powers and free the "glyphs" (representations of ancient virtues that the Leviathan corrupted). When all the glyphs are recovered, The Awakened One will be born. It alone has the power to defeat the Leviathan on the 15th island and restore harmony.

Put simply, with all the resourceful window-dressing removed from The Tone Rebellion, you can build three structures that harvest three all-important resources, one structure that extends your territory, and three structures that create unique fighting units. The Leviathan, meanwhile, has several dozen different kinds of spawning and fighting units with which to control all the tone nodes and atomize your entire civilization.

This description might imply that this is a dry game; not so. The Tone Rebellion isn't a series of bleached bones. It lives through its bizarre, wonderfully ingenious creatures, beautifully colored SVGA graphics, and attractive animations. The New Age soundtrack is excellent, too, reinforcing the game's otherworldly atmosphere.

Some of the Leviathan's strange minions deal death on one of the game's 15 island asteroids.

A complicating factor is Tone Rebellion's four realms. All creatures exist in one of these; each can be envisioned as forming the spoke of a wheel. Each realm dominates the realm to its right, and with the realm opposite, it experiences continuing shifts in the balance of power.

All this has two major effects. First, if you're playing a standalone game, your forces are limited to the realm you choose when starting out, but you'll encounter the Leviathan's minions from all four realms. Second, if you're in a multiplayer game (Internet or IPX network connection), the Leviathan might attack you with creatures from the realm against which you are weakest, but one of your partners is strongest. This adds a nice twist to multiplayer cooperation.

The Tone Rebellion's AI is solid. You can customize difficulty level and the number of islands per game. At its lowest setting, the game offers a reasonable challenge to beginners, while the highest level truly requires players' full cooperation to defeat the Leviathan.

Even the options menu at the top of the screen is designed to enhance the weird mood.

I really enjoyed The Tone Rebellion. It may seem a little thin to players who desire endless missions and thousands of armaments, but the classic features of C&C-style real-time strategy games are there—plus great graphics, a challenging multiplayer mode, and a delightfully imaginative universe in which to wander.

TONE REBELLION

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	A-
OVERALL	A-
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Wonderfully weird real-time strategy with great visuals and strong multiplay.

DEVELOPER:	The Logic Factory
PUBLISHER:	VIE 800-874-4607
WEB:	www.logicfactory.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 8MB RAM, 25MB HD, 2MB video RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$33

TIPS

▼ As you reconquer more worlds, designate a team of floaters from one of your dojos as a "wrecking crew." Set it to move back a few environments and destroy Tone-producing buildings. This will free up Tone flow and stop your workers from making long treks to find fresh Tone.

▼ Move your tribal center to a newly conquered island every few environments or so. It's a useful repository for different types of Tone and should be as close as possible to your current building sites. Move your dojos and spell towers, too, so that their floaters don't have to journey several worlds away to recharge. ▼ Spell floaters won't automatically defend or attack. You have to select and cast spells manually.

"This bully takes every other air combat sim I've played, sucker-punches 'em and then shoves their faces into the dirt. Hard."
-All About Games

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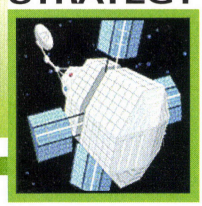


Entrepreneur

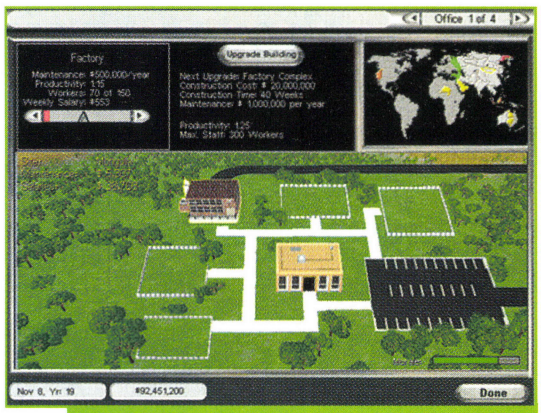
By Daniel "Rockefeller" Morris

Bill Gates? Larry Ellison? Chumps!

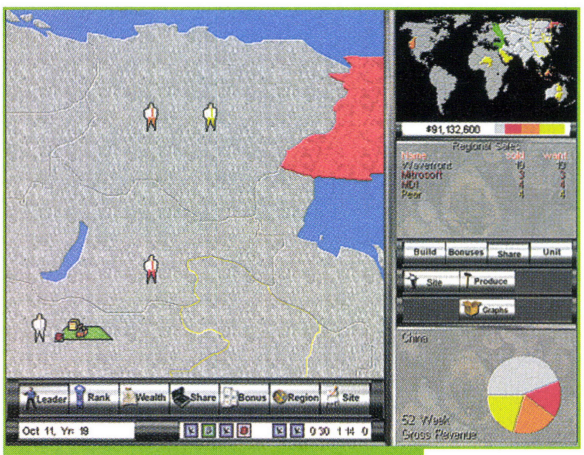
Isn't there always one name missing from the annual list of the Forbes 500 richest people? That's right, yours!

Stardock Systems, the fledgling Maryland game developer, offers you the means to correct this oversight through Entrepreneur, a marketplace sim billed as "World Domination Through Corporate Warfare."

Unlike most so-called business sims these days, Entrepreneur features no tanks, hovercraft, or warplanes. Up to eight corporations slug it out for market share, manufacturing their products, marketing them to consumer blocs with varying tastes, and dabbling in a little underhandedness.



Develop production sites: from simple factories to large, Microsoft-worthy corporate campuses.



Sales execs are your field generals in the campaign for global market share.

The best thing about Entrepreneur is evident even in the opening frames—a snarky sense of humor. Each session is "sponsored" by a fictional future corporation with a tongue-in-cheek mock advertisement taking slams at huge conglomerates like Microsoft or Lucent Technologies. Such humor is part and parcel of playing the game: with every research setback and negative headline, the game's designers take a less-than-affectionate stick to the eye of modern-day NASDAQ culture.

You begin your climb to corporate godhood by spending seed money on a basic factory in a randomly assigned country (either real Earth or a random map, but it doesn't really matter: even on real Earth, all the nations are assigned random characteristics). You upgrade and expand in very predictable fashion—from garage to factory to factory complex, adding employees and eventually building new sites in new market countries.

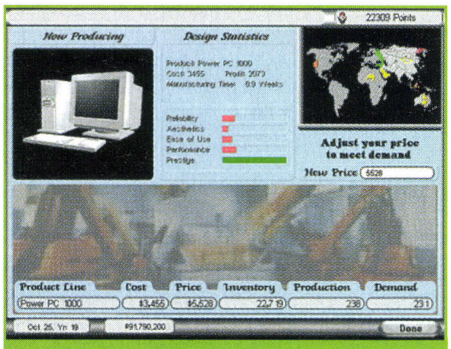
Your power pieces are the tie-wearing sales execs that you can fly to any market in the world, where they set up shop evangelizing for your company and boosting sales. Where you commit these pieces makes a big difference in the slice of the market pie you carve for yourself.

The other trump cards in your CEO's deck are literally cards—Monopoly-style action cards you gain with advancement that can be played at any time. They offer you such potent plays as media tip-offs that draw bad publicity to a competitor, massaging a nation's leaders into making your products the standard for their country, or even good old-fashioned boycotts that you set up by spreading horrible rumors about the competition, inciting reactionary backlashes against their products.

This becomes the stuff of big-time rivalry in multiplayer mode, because people have long memories. When it becomes clear that a rival has smeared you, Shakespearean revenge is never far from your mind. The trick is marshaling your cards to spring at opportune times, either keeping a runaway success in check, or applying the final nails in the coffin to a hapless entrant into one of your carefully guarded markets.

Sad to say, the yuks you gain at the expense of corporate monoliths are about all the fun to be had with Entrepreneur. The actual nuts and bolts of building your empire are, for the most part, as tedious as your average page of *The Wall Street Journal*. While incorporating elements of such classics as Capitalism, Risk, and Magic: The Gathering, Entrepreneur is never more involving than a Bloomberg update.

As big a fan of Capitalism and its ilk as I am, I'm sorry to report that Entrepreneur offers little payoff on your time investment (obvious business puns excused, I'm sure). While it's definitely simple enough for anyone to play and more viscerally punchy than your average "spreadsheet sim," there's just not enough to do or get absorbed in. Encouraging as its Internet focus is—the Stardock Web site will assist people in creating club pages, for example—you'll close up shop before long.



Tastes of a region's consumers will dictate what changes you make in your product.

ENTREPRENEUR

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	C-
SOUND CHECK:	C-
OVERALL	C-
MULTIPLAYER:	C+

A witty but uninvolving corporate sim.

PUBLISHER:	Stardock Systems 888-782-7362
WEB:	www.stardock.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P75, 16MB RAM, 28MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P90
STREET PRICE:	$45

TIPS ▼ Milk the media. A few uninformed tip-offs can quickly create a PR firestorm for a competitor. Plus you get to snicker at the gullibility of the press.

PLAY THE DEMO ON PC GAMES.EXE CD-ROM

Magic: The Gathering Spells of the Ancients

With Spells, you get a Sealed Deck Tournament and fewer bugs.

MTG was slow getting off the ground, but now its developers are hard at work producing add-ons. While working on multiplayer Internet capabilities for year's end, MicroProse has in the meantime issued Spells of the Ancients, a combination expansion set and general tune-up.

More cards, more fun

It's the new cards that first draw your attention. Spells incorporates 130-plus cards from the original Unlimited Edition, Arabian Nights, and Antiquities sets. Some are poorly chosen, like Darkpact, which only affects the choice of ante. Others, like many of the multicolor lands, make tri-color decks a distinct player possibility and a much greater threat from computer opponents in the Duel, Gauntlet, and Shandalar modules.

Sealed Deck Tournaments is another new feature, allowing you to play along a single elimination ladder—using randomly chosen decks— against a host of opponents. You pick the number of rounds, the match format, deck size, and so on.

Minor enhancements round out the Spells add-on. A Face Builder tool lets you customize your wizard's color, clothing, and other aspects of his appearance. Deck building has new filtering options for cards from the various editions. There are also 60 new pre-configured decks to try out; these make their greatest impact in Shandalar (where any computerized enemy now has a choice of two customized deck-types to play) and the Gauntlet.

The AI generally seems better at the higher levels, with fewer of the original's accidental mana burns or attacks with zero-power creatures. On the other hand, while some rules errors have been fixed, new ones seem to have appeared—Black Vise does double the damage, for example.

Memory issues are less bothersome, and duels are perceptibly faster. I'd still like to see sorts and filters that don't reset every time you leave a deck-building screen, but that's probably my only remaining complaint. —*Barry Brenesal*

SPELLS OF THE ANCIENTS

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

The Magic continues (but still no multiplay).

PUBLISHER:	MicroProse 800-695-4263
WEB:	www.microprose.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486/100, 16MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive, MTG 1.2
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$30

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Sarah clunks Akira as the dynamic camera-angle captures his embarrassing collapse.

Virtua Fighter 2

Console-style fighting fans haven't exactly been spoiled for choices over the last couple of years. Fortunately, Sega has invested some thought into producing what stands up as probably the best fighting game available for PCs.

VF2 takes everything that made the arcade version such a hit and adds some extra features, including the all-important Internet multiplayer option. While the graphics are a little crisper than the console version's, the horsepower needed to run them at the highest level is way excessive.

Victory!

Ten fighters are available, each with the requisite standard- and special-move combos. Kage's head-bouncing tactics on a fallen opponent are great, and Shun defies his "herbal medicine"–induced stumbling to be very nimble on his feet. But it's Virtua Fighter—you get the drift.

To facilitate control methods other than the recommended six-button joypad, keyboard keys and joystick buttons can all be configured. Likewise, the length, arena size, and replay time of each match can be adjusted.

Ranking and Expert modes provide the main single-player challenges, but multiplay is what it's all about. However, control was a little sluggish using two SideWinder gamepads on a single machine. At press time, the Mplayer Internet option wasn't available.

It's the five-per-side team battles that provide the most lasting appeal. A lobby allows players to meet, pair off for the fight, and return to register the winners and losers. This offers real longevity to a traditionally limited-lifespan genre.

Other bonuses include the Portrait Gallery—a collection of finely rendered images of the fighters. Since portraits weren't available in the console version's US release, they give an extra edge to VF2 for the PC.

While it supports MMX technology, VF2 could've really benefited from specific 3D acceleration support to put the consoles to shame. Still, it performs pretty well in testing conditions and supplies enough features to push it beyond the designation of "just another console port." —*Rob Smith*

VIRTUA FIGHTER 2

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	B+

B OVERALL

Better than a slap in the face.

PUBLISHER:	Sega Entertainment 888-734-2725
WEB:	www.sega.com/pc
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 45MB HD, 2MB video card, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P200, 32MB RAM, 370MB HD, MMX, SideWinder gamepad
STREET PRICE:	$40

Virtual Pool 2

No doubt about it, Virtual Pool was the finest pool sim ever (although I personally preferred the Snooker variant). VP2 takes exactly the same style and premise and updates it all—especially in its newly textured tables and balls.

An incredibly detailed physics-model replicates—with astonishing accuracy—the meeting of ball/cue, ball/ball, and ball/floor. As with the original, movement is plotted and timed by the pace and touch you exhibit with the mouse. Once a shot's lined up (after it's been viewed from any conceivable angle), the mouse becomes your cue for playing all the touch shots, power drives, and everything in between.

Now there's no excuse to go to the pub

Adjusting the spin of the ball is a breeze, giving you control over that cue ball you only dream about when faced with the real thing. Three different backdrops, five baize colors, and varying nap, pocket size, and rail-strength settings head up the options.

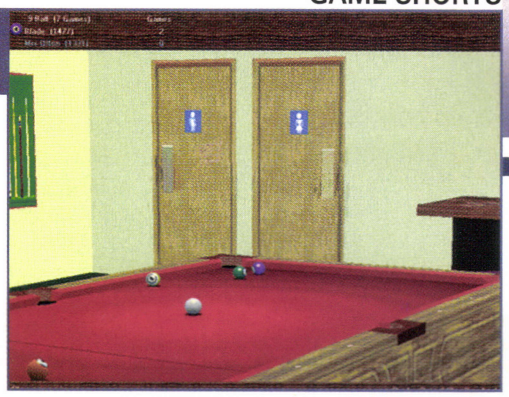
Virtually every conceivable pool-game variant is included (including some 3-ball options, 10-ball, and even English 8-ball). The 128 computer opponents are all ranked differently (you begin with a rank of 1,000 and rise or drop depending on your victories), but you're only likely to play those whose pseudonyms aren't too stupid (Two-Pocket Shakur, Bram Stroker, Forrest Jump?).

The videos of Mike Sigel offering tips and Lou Butera doing smart-ass tricks are well presented, with the key addition of a Try Shot button that sends you straight to the table with the balls set.

Tournament modes are disappointing in that there's no concept of event or purpose, or even a sense of achievement in victory. So multiplay is the real way to go, either over the Internet or a LAN. Like its predecessor, there are a couple of bugs in the rules calls and graphics glitches that need addressing with patches ASAP.

The excellent physics enhancements aren't going to bring VP2 to a whole new audience. It's entertaining as a multiplayer game, but with more thought given to its single-player option, it could have been definitively good. —*Rob Smith*

Realistic backgrounds set the scene for those beer-influenced shots.

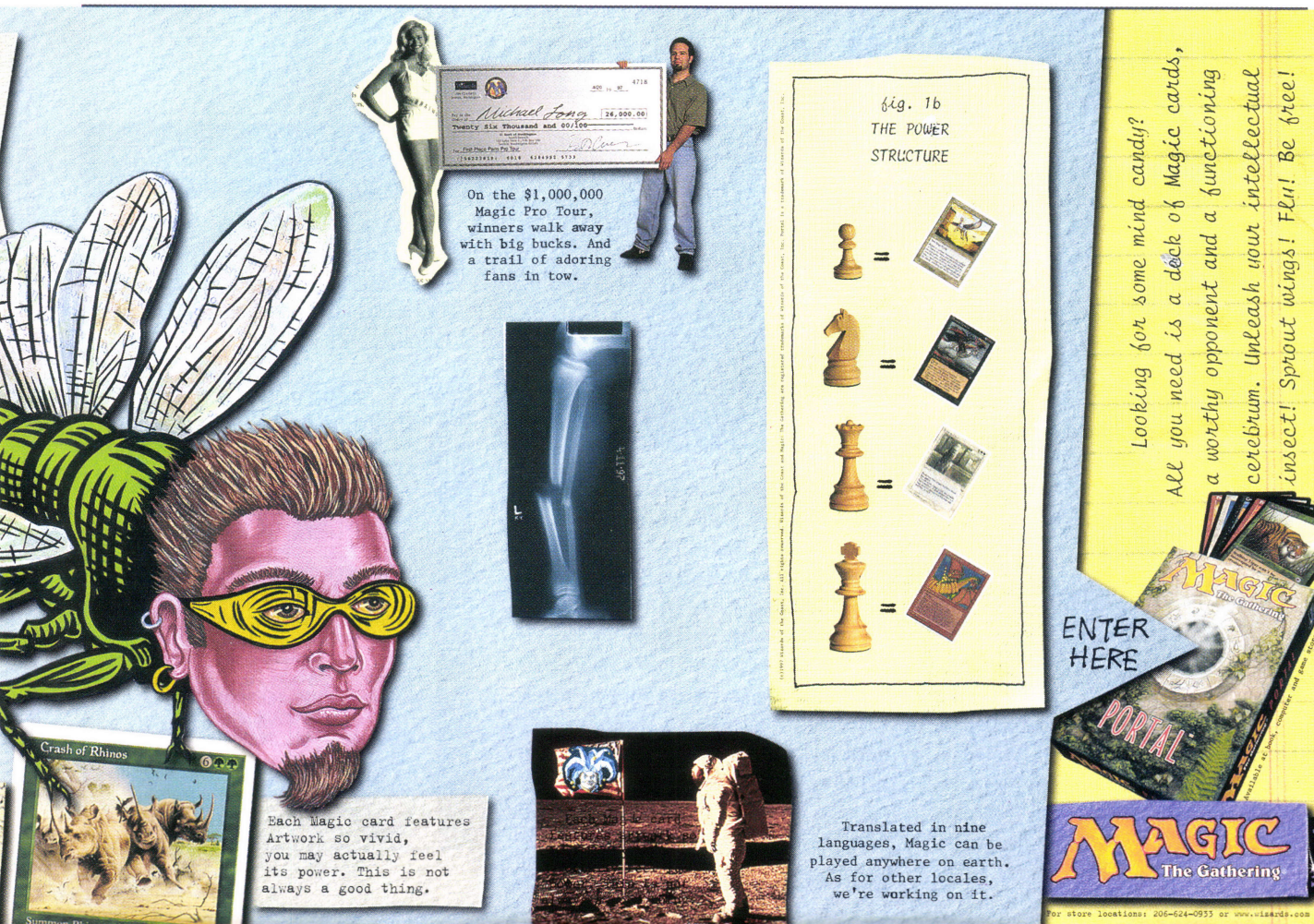


VIRTUAL POOL 2

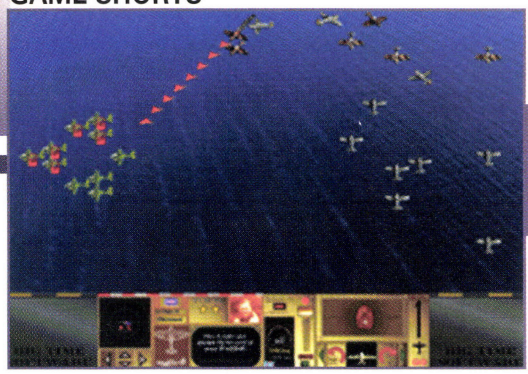
GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	**B**
MULTIPLAYER:	**B+**

As realistic as you'll get outside a pool hall.

DEVELOPER:	Celeris
PUBLISHER:	Interplay 800-468-3775
WEB:	www.interplay.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486/100, 8MB RAM, 10MB HD, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 16MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$45



Achtung Spitfire!



The odds encountered by British pilots in the Battle of Britain are accurately portrayed.

Are you a strategy-game fanatic who's sick of all this real-time fuss? Better still, are you a fan of a little-known game called Over the Reich? If so, good news: A follow-up to this title is out, and it offers almost limitless hours of classic, strategic fun.

Like its predecessor, Achtung Spitfire! is a turn-based strategy game wherein you direct squadrons of airplanes in mass dogfights over war-torn WWII Europe. Where OTR was based on the later stages of the war, Achtung is set earlier, focusing on the Battle of Britain.

Real-time fans need not apply

You can try and stave off the oppressive might of the Germans as the stout-hearted Brits, or win the battle for the skies as the Germans. A third French campaign, with some "what-if" scenarios, is thrown in for giggles and air-war historians. In this campaign, your goal is simply to survive as long as possible against the Germans while inflicting as many losses as you can. Head-to-head play is supported via hotseat and Internet.

The biggest addition is a real-time operations map for both the British and German campaigns. In this mode, you must decide, as time ticks away, how to divide your forces, where to patrol, and what types of planes to use. You also have to consider refueling time for patrol aircraft, as well as rest and recuperation time for your pilots. Time stops when combat begins, and the combat scenarios are turn-based. When you're fighting, the number, type, and location of enemy planes encountered are random, so no two missions are exactly alike.

This may seem like a small improvement, but it goes miles in terms of conveying the chaos of those pitched battles for Britain. Particularly when you play as the Brits, you'll be faced with overwhelming odds, and each pilot you lose will make you cringe, as will each poor tactical decision.

Like its forebear, Achtung is a big, big game from a small company. It shouldn't be overlooked by strategy purists. —*Steve Klett*

ACHTUNG SPITFIRE!

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	C-
SOUND CHECK:	C-
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	C

Challenging, trend-busting turn-based war gaming.

DEVELOPER:	Big Time Software
PUBLISHER:	Avalon Hill 800-999-3222
WEB:	www.bigtimesoftware.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95/Mac CD
REQUIRES:	486, 8MB RAM, 57MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P90, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$40

Need for Speed II: Special Edition

New options, such as reverse mode, make the newest NFS a fast-action frenzy.

There's a good chance you already own Need for Speed II, and you're wondering if EA's new Special Edition is worth buying. The simple answer is *yes*. NFS II: SE will make believers of you all.

NFS II happens to be one of the fastest network racing games available for the PC, and it runs smoothly nearly every time out. Gameplay and track design had the *PC Games* office in an uproarious, multiple-late-night, four-lap racing nirvana—so how could EA make it better? More cars? More tracks? Maybe they could give you the option to race each track in reverse, or mirrored...or even both?

Now you'll definitely feel it

EA's added all of these features and more to SE. There are four new cars: The Ferrari 355, Ford Mach 3, Italdesign Nazca C2, and Ford Indigo really add some flair to network games. (The Ford Mach 3 is a convertible coupe!) This gives you 12 high-powered sports cars to drive. A brand-new track has also been added, bringing the track total to seven, plus a bonus level. The new track, Last Resort, sends drivers through the hills of Mexico. Steep mountains, hot lava, and dense jungles make this course a challenge in every way. You also now have the option to race each track in mirror and reverse modes, which give all the old tracks new life.

As if all that isn't enough, EA went back and coded the whole engine for 3Dfx support. NFS II: SE runs at 30 frames per second on a P150—and you get all sorts of new visual effects: rain, snowfall, fog, even bugs splattering on your windshield.

If you're new to the NFS series, this is easily the best version of the set. On the other hand, if you own NFS II and you're still not convinced, EA is offering you a $20 rebate off your purchase of SE. Awesome! —*Nash Werner*

NEED FOR SPEED II: SE

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	A+
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	A
MULTIPLAYER:	A+

The best-looking driving game just got a face-lift.

PUBLISHER:	Electronic Arts 800-245-4525
WEB:	www.ea.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 16MB RAM, 3Dfx card
STREET PRICE:	$50

PLAY THE DEMO ON PC GAMES.EXE CD-ROM

Manx TT Super Bike

Look, down on the track: It's a bird...it's a plane...it's a Super Bike!

With Electronic Arts' Moto Racer GP high on my personal list of current favorites, I was eagerly awaiting Manx TT Super Bike, Sega's newest coin-op conversion. And overall, Sega has put together a fairly exciting moto-racing game that truly puts out in the visuals department—that is, if you've got a 3Dfx accelerator under the hood.

Manx TT Super Bike is based on the annual Isle of Man Trophy, challenging gamers to burn rubber over four tracks—well, actually two tracks that can be played in reverse, a feature that provoked my first concern. Yes, the tracks that Manx TT offers are fun, but they become too easy after a couple of laps. And that's another thing...the game doesn't feature a difficulty setting. I finished the game in a measly hour and a half—depressing, when you compare it with Moto's eight tracks (16 total, if you count mirror mode). Quite frankly, the only thing that kept me coming back for more was the fact that it allowed for up to eight-player games via LAN, or four players over a modem, TCP/IP, or IPX—but even multiplayer games got tiresome after awhile.

Strap on your helmet and burn rubber

There's a good selection of 11 bikes to choose from, three of which are "Super Bikes" that can be obtained only after beating the challenge mode. Speaking of play modes, the game has four different selections: Time Trial, PC, Arcade, and Network. Good control and a decent sense of speed—a sensation that must be present in any enjoyable racing title—help the realism factor. And yet, I kept pressing for that nitro button and was brutally let down each time I realized there wasn't nitro on these "Super Bikes." Okay, so I'm comparing it with Moto Racer again. Maybe I shouldn't, but you will, too.

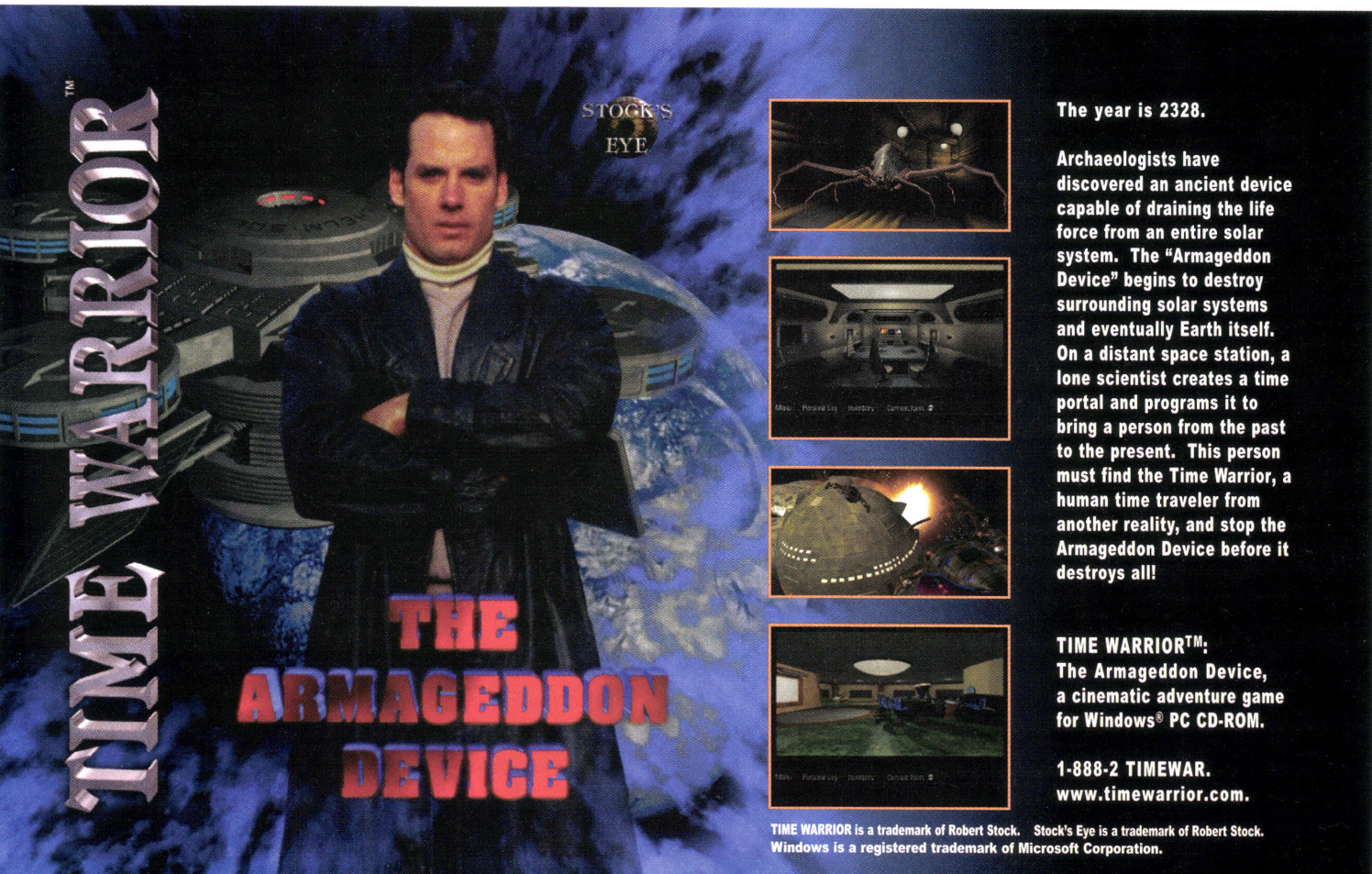
Manx TT Super Bike may not have taken the place of Moto Racer on my hard drive, but it does deliver some palm-sweating moments, especially when you play against a buddy. —*Joe McCloud*

MANX TT SUPER BIKE

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	C+
OVERALL	**C+**
MULTIPLAYER:	**B-**

Entertaining, but leaves you wanting more.

DEVELOPER:	Perfect Entertainment
PUBLISHER:	Sega of America 800-872-7342
WEB:	www.sega.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 15MB HD
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 3Dfx, joystick
STREET PRICE:	$40



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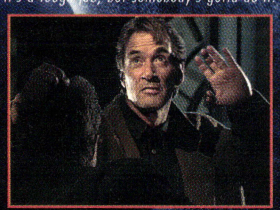

Tex meets up with a hitman who takes his job literally.

"Cozy little place you've got here."

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Creative Dxr2 DVD-ROM Drive

By George T. Chronis

RATING: C+

DVD-ROM drives were all the vaporware rage a year ago. Now that there's a selection of them to go around, it's hard to come up with a good reason to buy one at the end of 1997. True, the concept of replacing five or more CDs (with games like Obsidian) with just one is attractive, but is that enough of a reason to plop down $300-plus on a DVD-ROM drive like Creative's Dxr2?

Maybe in a couple of years there'll be more games that take advantage of DVD-ROM's 4-plus gigs of storage and high-quality video compression, but for most gamers, being able to watch DVD movies on their computers probably isn't much of draw. Still, if you have to have the latest thing, the Dxr2 is a good starter package.

Most of what you see in the DVD version of Claw is no different from the standard version.

For your money, you get a DVD-ROM drive, an MPEG-2 video card, a Dolby AC-3 audio decoder card, and various cables. The drive looks and installs like any regular CD-ROM drive. The MPEG-2 card is a standard PCI product. Like a pass-through 3D video accelerator, you connect the VGA-out from your video card to the VGA-in on the MPEG-2 card, and then plug the monitor into the MPEG-2 card. Similar stringing of cables is done between the sound card and the MPEG-2 card.

You may want DVD, but do you need DVD?

If you're replacing an existing CD-ROM drive and have an extra PCI slot on hand, physical installation is quite easy. In our case, a garden-variety Acer Aspire P200 was used as the guinea pig. Like a lot of recent consumer PCs out there, the Acer has ATI's Rage video controller on the motherboard. Although there were no device conflicts after installing the software drivers, the built-in video wasn't up to the task of playing DVD media. The system would usually crash after 10 minutes of DVD-movie playback—always with weird horizontal-line artifacts appearing on the screen right before the crash. Disabling the built-in video and installing a spare STB Nitro 3D solved the problem.

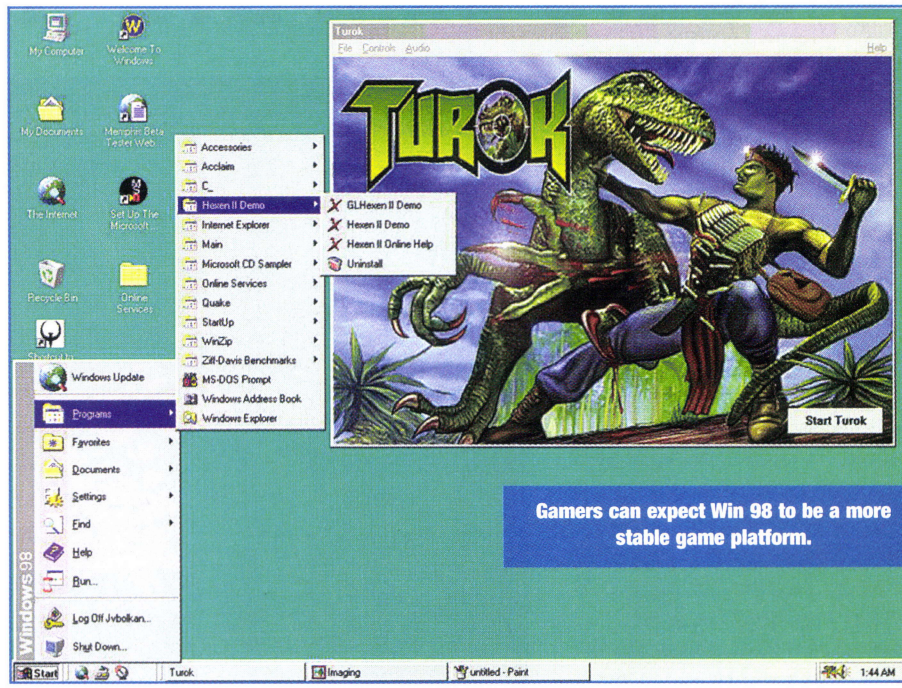
As for the quality of the video experience, the full-motion video images from a selection of Hollywood flicks and bundled games such as Claw and Silent Steel were acceptable, but nowhere near as clear and sharp as what's delivered by DVD home players you can buy for $400 at Sears or Circuit City. And that was using a more-than-capable Sony 200sf 17-inch monitor. The explanation most often given for the difference in image quality is that not all MPEG-2 boards are created equal, and competitive DVD-ROM drive makers want to keep their street prices down.

While the video didn't seem up to the billing of DVD-ROM boosters, the AC-3 audio quality was phenomenal. AC-3 is a home-theater audio standard that makes the humble Altec Lansing Multimedia system plugged into the Acer sound like something from Cambridge Soundworks.

Although its CD tray and transport mechanism aren't as solid as many others on the market, the Dxr2 will read CD-ROMs that first-generation DVD-ROM drives won't. Given that Creative is marketing this package, you'll likely find it for a decent price at major retailers across the nation. If you're looking for a basic entry-level DVD-ROM experience at a reasonable price, the Dxr2 can be recommended. But don't expect what you get to live up to all the hype. (Creative; 800-998-5227; www.creaf.com; street $350)

Tactical Recon: Win 98 Beta

By J.V. Bolkan



Gamers can expect Win 98 to be a more stable game platform.

The future is often the past when it comes to Microsoft and Windows. Windows 95 was delayed numerous times before it finally arrived in August 1995. Windows 97, originally slated for release late this year, was first rescheduled for the first quarter of 1998 and has just been pushed back again to the second quarter. Although the OS, now known as Windows 98, seems to be walking in Win 95's shoes, it really has more in common with the incremental move from Windows 3.0 to 3.1. But just because Win 98 isn't a major rewrite doesn't mean it's not an important release for gamers.

PC Games tried out the most recent Win 98 beta to see what gamers have to look forward to. Our look revealed that improvements under the hood are the real news, although minor tweaks to the interface will surely get the most attention in the mainstream media. Gamers are going to appreciate the improved networking abilities, especially smoother integration with the Internet and Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone. A new driver model and the continued improvement of DirectX will prove even more helpful.

Game lovers battered by escalating hardware requirements will especially appreciate that Win 98 should run on virtually any system that can run Win 95. At the same time, Win 98 will offer support for new hardware advances such as USB, Intel's AGP, and MMX technologies. The list of built-in drivers for hardware add-ins has also been seriously increased.

Microsoft will be building improved Internet connectivity into Win 98, enhancing the playability of Internet Gaming Zone titles such as Fighter Ace.

The interface changes are relatively minor and, for the most part, helpful: if you're able to get around in Win 95, you'll have no trouble in 98. If you're more comfortable navigating with your Internet browser, new browser-style icons in Windows Explorer will enable you to jump forward and back, load documents, and even log onto Web sites.

But for the most part, Win 98 doesn't seem much different than Win 95. There were no perceptible differences in the way games such as Hexen II or Turok: Dinosaur Hunter ran on either version of Windows. Bottom line: Games that run well under Win 95 should run at least as well on Win 98.

Obviously, beta software is a work in progress. Although it's too early to say with authority which of the new features will ultimately make it from beta to the final version, it's safe to discuss what *won't* be in the upgrade. There are no plans to add NT features such as support for multiple processors, and although support for MMX is enhanced, the operating system itself doesn't take full advantage of it. Originally, Microsoft had intended to release Win 98 upgrades in two flavors—an upgrade from Win 95, followed by a version for Win 3.x users. However, protests from retailers have forced Microsoft to include support for all older versions in a single upgrade. This change is reportedly the cause for the latest delay, although some industry pundits believe it was due to angry PC hardware–makers, who fear that consumers might hold off system purchases during the holidays until after Win 98 begins shipping next year.

When it finally does ship, though, it probably won't be accompanied by the kind of marketing blitz we experienced with Win 95's premiere. Thank God for that... (Microsoft; 800-426-9400; www.microsoft.com; price to be determined)

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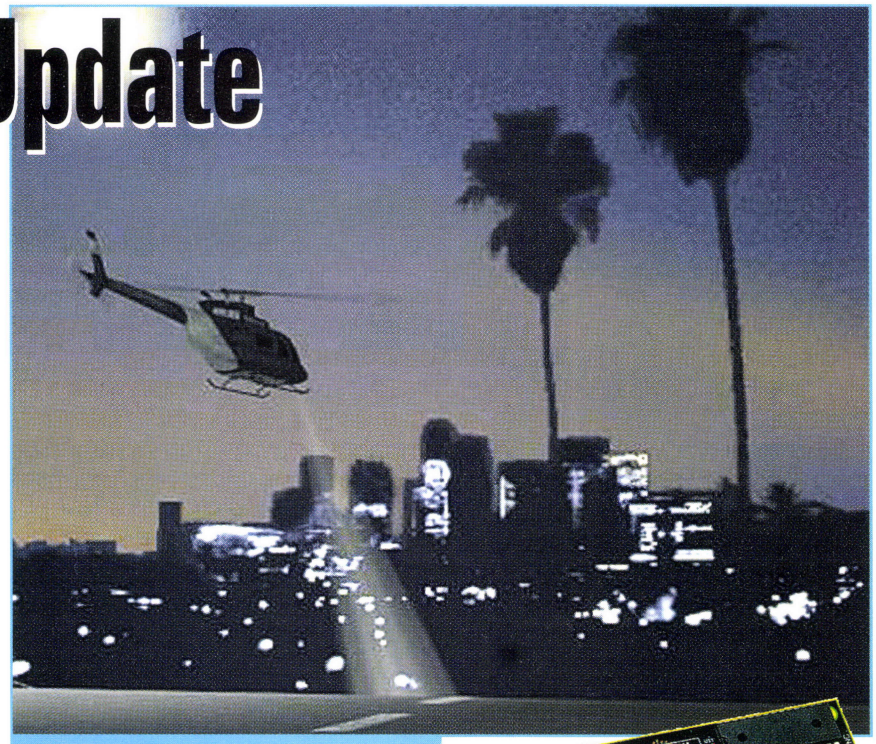
AGP/USB Update

By David Gerding



USB and AGP—where are they?

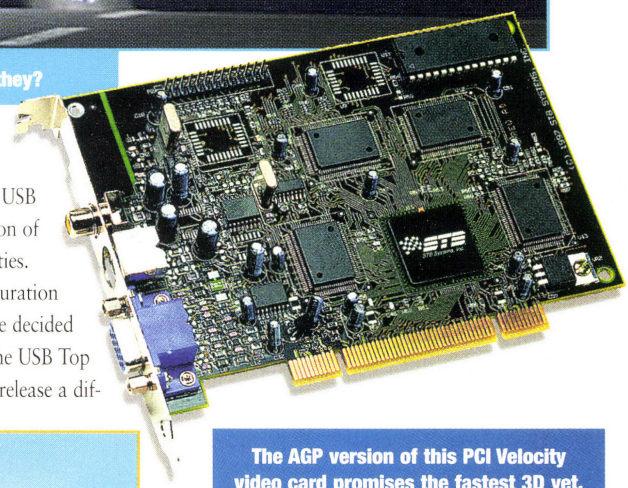
In the alphabet soup of pending technologies, two of the most anticipated by the gaming crowd are AGP (advanced graphics port) and USB (universal serial bus). Now the bad news: Unless you buy a brand-new PC, you're going to find it very difficult to get ahold of these any time soon.

If you bought a new motherboard or computer during the last 12 months, you probably already have an unused USB port or connector. But AGP is a more involved feature to implement, so only computers shipping now have this port.

Even if you already have a PC that has a USB connection, you're probably still going to have to wait. USB is a bidirectional hookup that makes it possible for more data to be transferred between the stick and the computer, which should allow upcoming games more latitude in reacting to a player's unique twitching style. The least solid aspect of the USB specification is the so-called HID (human interface device) section. Unfortunately, that's the section of the specification most likely to involve game technology, because it covers everything from joysticks to head-mounted displays. The USB support in Windows 98 is reportedly far more fleshed out than that currently found in Windows 95, so the main thing keeping those cool all-digital USB joysticks out of your hands is Win 98's delayed shipment (see "Tactical Recon," Technobabble, this issue).

ThrustMaster took the lead on the USB joystick front by releasing a USB version of its Top Gun flightstick in small quantities. Due to delays with Win 98 and configuration bugs in Win 95, the company has since decided to scrap plans for a major rollout of the USB Top Gun, although ThrustMaster may yet release a different USB stick and gamepad in time for Christmas. Microsoft reportedly has a USB version of its force-feedback stick in the works, but it won't confirm that it will actually ship the product. Expect force-feedback proponents to jump on the USB bandwagon as soon as Win 98 is a reality. These sticks are particularly likely to benefit from the high-bandwidth capabilities of USB because of their high system requirements.

Because of USB's significant promise, it's probably wise to hold off on any major joystick expenditures. USB versions of the best sticks are likely just around the corner and



The AGP version of this PCI Velocity video card promises the fastest 3D yet.

What You'll Need in Win 95

You say you can't wait for Win 98 because there was a USB joystick under the tree? Okay—here's what you need:

To run either AGP or USB, you need to make sure you have the very latest version of Win 95, called Win 95 OSR-2 (operating system release 2). The version number is 950-B. OSR-2 wasn't released for retail, but it was made available to PC makers early this year. If you bought a new computer during 1997 and it has a multigigabyte hard disk, you likely have OSR-2 installed. If you don't have OSR-2, check out Microsoft's Web site for a host of patches that can get you there.

Even if you get ahold of a USB joystick this Christmas, beware. First, you need to understand that your USB stick will only work with Win 95 games that use DirectPlay. Also, the lack of Win 98's more sophisticated USB support may cause problems. For example, ThrustMaster's early USB stick had problems running under Win 95 (OSR-2) with Direct X 5.0's DirectPlay.

AGP cards require an AGP motherboard. If you want AGP today, you need to get a new machine that comes equipped with an AGP card. By the second quarter of 1998, the first retail AGP upgrade kits should start appearing. Support for AGP will be native in Win 98, but meanwhile, you need a device driver supplied with the graphics card to get AGP cards to work under Win 95.

The USB Top Gun has been shot down.

should offer perceptible improvements over existing designs. But Falcon Northwest's Director of Sales Brent Caldwell says USB technology has been widely over-hyped before it was ready, so be careful about jumping on the bandwagon too early.

For example, Altec Lansing has been promoting a set of USB speakers for more than a year, but its release has been held up by delays in Win 98.

Better news is brewing in the AGP camp, where products are actually shipping. AGP has its own separate slot and moves video functions to their own separate and wider data-channel while drawing from main system RAM—dramatically improving performance, in theory. What you will see is an extra PCI slot where the video card used to go—important if your case is already maxed out with cards. But early looks at the first AGP graphics cards confirm that video-board makers have yet to implement the faster 133MHz Series 2 bandwidth, so the first group of AGP cards are using the same 66MHz bandwidth used by standard PCI video cards. As a result, you won't see that much of a speed boost yet. The fastest of the AGP cards are those based on the new N-VIDIA 128 chip, such as Diamond's Viper 330. Other hot AGP graphics boards now available include STB's Velocity (the non-AGP version of which is reviewed in this section) and Number 9's Ticket to Ride.

According to Caldwell, AGP will likely replace the PCI slot as your video-card plug, just as PCI products replaced VLB products a few years ago. But Caldwell says AGP video cards probably won't start becoming an industry standard for at least six months, when the Series 2 bandwidth speeds are used. If you buy a new PC today, it's your choice whether to use the new AGP port or a standard PCI slot for video. But if you're outfitting a new PC right now, you'd be well advised to check out AGP video-card options before plunking down your cash.

Altec has been talking about its USB speakers for more than a year.

HARDWARE HALL OF FAME

Wondering what hardware to buy to get the best game machine for your money? It's easy: just check *PC Games*' running list of our top hardware recommendations. Each month, we'll update the Hall of Fame as we review new products.

CATEGORY	PRODUCT	DETAILS	OUR RATING
PC	Falcon Mach V	Falcon Northwest; 800-258-6778; approx. $4,000	A
Monitor	Optiquest V775 17-inch	ViewSonic; 800-888-8583; approx. $600	A
CD-ROM drive	FX240	Mitsumi; 800-648-7861; approx. $199	A-
Sound card	AWE64	Creative Labs; 800-998-5227; $129	A
Speakers	ACS55 Power Gaming System	Altec Lansing; 800-258-3288; approx. $150	A
Joystick	F-16 Combatstick	CH Products; 619-598-2518; $69.95	A+
Gamepad	SideWinder Gamepad	Microsoft; 206-882-8080; $39	A+
Modem	SupraExpress 336i SP	Diamond; 800-727-8772; approx. $125	A
Graphics card	Stealth 3D 2000 Pro	Diamond; 800-727-8772; approx. $160	A
Key add-on	Monster 3D Monster Sound 3D	Diamond; 800-727-8772; approx. $180 800-727-8772; approx. $199	A

Xi Dual 266MHz Pentium II

By J.V. Bolkan

The OS and system you'll be playing Turok 2 on in a couple of years may surprise you.

We know some of you speed demons out there are salivating over the prospect of dual-processor Pentium II boxes. We get your email all the time asking whether you should invest in one of these horses. To answer that question, we obtained a double 266MHz Pentium II workstation from Xi Computer Corp. Now, before the technically literate among you out there start whining the differences between a killer game system and a professional graphics workstation have less to do with the cost of the systems than with the software they can run.

In many ways, the Xi system sounds like a candidate for the ultimate game machine. It's loaded with tons of RAM (128MB); not one, but two extremely fast MMX-enabled CPUs; a Creative AWE32 sound system with a three-piece Altec Lansing speaker set; and one of the fastest, most powerful graphics cards on the planet—Intergraph's Intense 3D Pro/T with 48MB of RAM and built-in 3D texture mapping.

In reality, the Xi is a killer game-creation system. However, as a game-playing platform, it's an exercise in wasted potential. Windows 95 and DOS simply ignore the second CPU. To use it, you need to run a multithreaded operating system like Windows NT 4.0. Unfortunately, because NT doesn't fully support DirectX, most games won't play under it. It wouldn't matter anyway, because even under a multi-threaded OS, the software must be written to take advantage of multi-threading, and no one does that with games yet.

But two years from now, game developers may be singing a different tune. NT 5.0, which will support the latest DirectX drivers, will be in circulation. Windows 2000, the DOS-killer OS that will be based on the NT kernel, will also be right around the corner. And you know game designers—they have to take advantage of the fastest systems around.

But that's the near future. What about using a dual-Pentium II today? Even if you discount the wasted CPU, you can't overlook the game-playing problems of the graphics card. The Intense 3D Pro/T is one of the best OpenGL cards money can buy, but it doesn't play common OpenGL games such as GLQuake or GLHexen II very well. The problem is that id, one of the biggest proponents of OpenGL games, writes them to run on the 3Dfx Voodoo chip rather than on professional OpenGL processors. Not surprisingly, the Intense 3D Pro doesn't support DirectX and doesn't even have a Win 95–specific driver. Essentially, the best graphics card around won't even play anything other than Solitaire and the other games included in NT.

When we swapped the graphics card for Intergraph's new Intense 3D Voodoo, things did start to look up. It was strange to replace a $3,995 3D accelerator with a $399 card from the same company and consider it an upgrade, but it was. With the Voodoo card in place running on a beta version of Win 98, we were able to enjoy the benefits of both OpenGL and DirectX acceleration. Using 3D WinBench, the combination of Intense 3D Voodoo and Xi produced a score of 161. In comparison, an Orchid Righteous 3D (also based on the Voodoo chipset) on a 200MHz Pentium with 32MB of RAM achieved a 113 in the same test.

Maybe when NT 5.0, due in spring 1998, becomes more common on the desktop, game makers will add the multithreading capabilities that would make dual-CPU systems like the Xi into truly awesome game performers. As it is, the Xi is a great machine that, unfortunately, is forced to play with one arm tied behind its back. (Xi Computer Corp.; 800-432-0486; www.xicomputer.com; street $7,199)

Dual-CPU Pentiums: Are they worth the money?

HOW FAST IS IT?

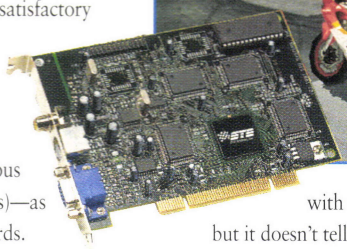
Processor Score:	234
Video Score:	89
Hard Drive Score:	201

**PC Games* Labs uses a standard Acer 200MHz Pentium as a baseline system for comparison, with baseline benchmarks of 100 in processor, video, and hard-drive categories. Computer systems are compared using WinBench 97.

STB Velocity 128

RATING: A

The 128 shows what D3D can do for games like Moto Racer.



It seems like only yesterday I was installing the STB Nitro 3D video card into my system at home, with mostly satisfactory results. Now, suddenly, STB drops its latest and greatest polygon-pusher, the Velocity 128, on the market and instantly eclipses all its previous products (sorry, Nitro owners)—as well as most other 2D/3D cards. No one said it was easy staying on the bleeding edge.

Simply put, the 128 is one screamin' video card. Tech hounds, brace yourselves: the 128 has an integrated 230MHz RAMDAC (providing super-fast refresh rates on monitors up to 21 inches) and 4MB of 100MHz SGRAM memory, and it's based on the 128-bit N-VIDIA RIVA 128 accelerator chip. STB claims the Velocity 128 delivers a 100-million-rendered-pixel-per-second fill rate and 15 billion pixel operations per second.

Sounds impressive, but what does that mean when it comes to games? Good things, indeed.

The card supports both Microsoft's D3D and OpenGL APIs, meaning it'll give a wide variety of games a 3D makeover. It handles the included D3D titles Moto Racer and I-76 very nicely (the non–3D accelerated FIFA '97 is thrown in for fun). Unfortunately, Win 95 GL drivers from N-VIDIA will be available by the time you read this but weren't on hand at press time, so we can't tell you how Hexen II or GLQuake performed. Although N-VIDIA promises to have compatibility problems with GLQuake 1.09 ironed out by then, STB recommends using version 1.08 if you encounter any bugs.

As an added bonus, and in the "it's about time" category for this gamer, the card has BIOS support for VESA VBE 3.0, which means much-improved DOS-game compatibility. Hexen II, for example, can be run in resolutions all the way up to 1280-by-1024 without any special tweaking. The 128 delivered a solid 15 to 18 fps in 800-by-600 resolution, and 22 fps in 640-by-480 in Hexen II. (Over 800-by-600, the frame rate drops to unacceptable levels on a P200 with 32MB of RAM, but that's expected.)

Installation is a minor bummer. The card ships with updated drivers on floppy disk, but it doesn't tell you to install those rather than the ones on the CD, and it doesn't tell you how to do that, either. For those used to dealing with drivers, this is no big deal, but it's a potential stumbler for PC novices.

Nonetheless, the Velocity 128 is a solid all-round video card with lots to offer gamers. (STB; 800-234-4334; www.stb.com; street $199) —*Steve Klett*

Intense 3D Voodoo

RATING: C+

Ah, would that Intergraph's Intense 3D Voodoo were more of a rush.

After all, the good things about this all-in-one 3Dfx card are really good. It has an impressive feature set: 6MB of DRAM, with 4MB allocated to frame buffering and 2MB to textures; a cranking 128-bit 2D processor; DVD support; S-Video and composite video-out ports to hook into your TV.

You get rugged construction and better handling from ThrustMaster's latest wheel.

NASCAR Pro Racing Wheel

RATING: A

We have a few wanna-be race-car drivers here at *PC Games*, and they always seem to beat me to the finish line. But now, I've connected my new ThrustMaster NASCAR Pro Racing Wheel. The dirty lot won't be winning anymore.

Right out of the box, this wheel is the one to beat. High-impact plastic graces this beast, and it's covered by a thick rubber grip. I couldn't wait to load up NASCAR 2 and put the wheel to the test. I plugged it in, the software installed seamlessly, and I was off to the races. The NPRW handled nicely, and the firm wheel and pedal resistance are almost as good as the real thing. With everything from Formula 1 to Need for Speed II: SE, the turning resistance remained top-notch—a league above ThrustMaster's old T2's resistance.

ThrustMaster has placed the two buttons on the wheel spokes, making them easy to get to and great for look-back and horn duties. On the side of the wheel console is an improved two-way stick shift with a rubber ring-guard around its base. The net benefit is that this stick feels more responsive than the one that came with the T2.

On to the pedals. Those old undersized pedals are long gone: enter Pro Racing Wheel's giant-size pedals. I couldn't believe what a great job they did on these: the look, the feel—they're almost perfect. But the pedal base itself seems to tip over when you hit the brake too hard. This obstacle is easily overcome if you drill holes in your floor and bolt it directly to your home—a solution any hardcore racing fan wouldn't hesitate to implement.

Another improvement is the console's mounting clamps. No more tiny plastic clamps with horrible little screws. These new clamps are huge and have rounded bases, providing leverage for different table thicknesses. Also, the stoppers are now articulated for a better grasp. Oh, happy day!

Turn after turn, lap after lap, this wheel held up and performed admirably—helping me beat off the likes of Jeff Gordon and ole Dale Earnhardt. My colleagues don't stand a chance. (ThrustMaster; 503-615-3200; www.thrustmaster.com; street $69) —*Nash Werner*

Then there's the impressive bundle of Turok, Moto Racer, and AH-64D Longbow—all games that benefit immensely from 3Dfx acceleration. At $229 on the street, it's a killer package, right?

Well, there's the small matter of the Voodoo Rush chipset it's based on…and that should be enough to give you pause. 3Dfx hasn't worked out all the bugs on this set yet, and the result is that you'll find it tricky to set up—and not everything you want to play will work too well. For instance, Jedi Knight crashes on the spot—and that's a game I *need* to play. (3Dfx even offered a trade-in of a standard Voodoo card in exchange for the Rush daughtercard in the Hercules Stingray 128—see story in this month's GameWire.)

When the Intense 3D Voodoo does work, though, it's a splendid sight. I got Hexen II working after replacing my existing DirectX 5.0 drivers with the ones supplied on the Intergraph driver disc. Once done, GLHexen II performed flawlessly too. GLQuake clipped along at an amazingly textured 28 to 40 frames per second. The bundled Turok was the most astonishing—I literally got motion sickness from the fogging effects, something I've only experienced playing Descent with a VR headset. It's not often I make nausea a factor in recommending a piece of hardware, but it speaks to the realism this card can convey. 2D support and Direct3D-only support were also quite fine, thank you.

Even as good as the Intense 3D Voodoo can be, waiting on improved drivers might be wise for now. And if you don't need everything this package offers, you might be better off with a classic Voodoo card at a few $20s less. (Intergraph; 800-692-8069; www.intergraph.com/ics; street $229) —*Don St. John*

Hercules Stingray 128/3D

RATING: B-

The ideal all-in-one gamer's solution? That's certainly a possibility for this 6MB card, which combines 2D and 3Dfx Voodoo Rush in one package. The card tested was the new version that no longer had the daughterboard attachment. In fact, the whole Voodoo Rush performance issue has turned into something of a heated debate (again, see story in GameWire). But here's our experience…

Installing the Stingray into an Acer P200 was a breeze: Win 95 recognized it perfectly and installed the display software without any problem. Two driver options were installed: Alliance 3D plus Voodoo Rush and Hercules Stingray. These out-of-box drivers can already be updated with a download, and a further update of drivers, as well as the card's BIOS, was being finalized at press time (as were the three games Hercules will bundle with the card). So, time to try it out. GLQuake was the first port of call. Using the Hercules drivers, it ran without problems and turned in a 20 fps rate. We did get some strange graphical glitches when the alternate Alliance drivers were used. GLHexen II also worked impressively right out of the box. So what about Jedi Knight? Here we hit problems. While the game recognized the card, it threw up a black screen when the game screen loaded. Likewise, the card failed to play Myth: The Fallen Lords beta software in glorious 3Dfx.

Playing Jedi Knight in 3D mode will drive some people to extremes.

Nintendo 3D PC Joystick

RATING: B

What's Nintendo up to?

There's something strange about attaching the new Nintendo 3D PC Joystick to your system. The familiar gun-metal grays and blue accents look, well, like they belong attached to a Nintendo 64. The good news is that the effect is curiously cool on the PC desktop. Laral, the company that manufactures the stick, clearly spent as much time on the stick's appearance as it did on its engineering. Visually, at least, they've succeeded.

Why is Nintendo lending its name and style to a PC peripheral? Barring any last-minute conversion to PC gaming, the 3D PC Joystick is probably just the result of a smart licensing deal. But strip away the Nintendo trappings, and this is a decent midlevel stick.

As far as mechanics go, the stick features eight buttons, a four-way coolie hat, and throttle slide control. In addition, the stick offers rudder control by allowing the user to twist it clockwise or counterclockwise. Of the eight buttons, four are used to activate the turbo (repeat-fire) function of the complementary four buttons.

The 3D PC Joystick can operate in three modes, two of which emulate the most popular sticks out there, including the CH Flightstick and the ThrustMaster. In these modes, the four buttons on the base turn on and off the turbo feature of the corresponding buttons on the stick. Small LEDs above each base button let you know when turbo is on—a nice touch. And an arcade mode reverses the functionality of the button sets, letting the stick play more like a gamepad.

Compared to mass-marketed sticks from Logitech and Microsoft, the 3D PC Joystick has a good grip, but like most sticks, it's designed only with right-handed use in mind. Other downsides include sparse documentation and slightly lumpy axis movement, despite a nice resistance balance. Overall, though, the 3D PC is a surprisingly good first effort. (Laral Group; 888-229-2118; www.pcperiph-nintendo.com; street $59) —*David Gerding*

Monitors do not inspire by price alone.

Other system glitches cropped up with the card installed. One particular problem was an automatic rebooting of the system after the monitor powered down, was restarted, and an application was launched—the machine simply gave up the ghost and shut down. No damage done, but when the card was removed, these glitches disappeared.

Since we were still desperate to play Jedi Knight with 3D acceleration, we installed the card in an AST P166. Same installation ease, and the 3Dfx burst into life whenever called upon in Jedi Knight. GLQuake and GLHexen ran flawlessly as well. Hercules is unsure about the cause of the initial problems, which could potentially be fixed with the updated BIOS and drivers, but the fact remains that some reliability issues persist.

Still, the Stingray is a fine card, turning in performance just shy of the standard Voodoo Graphics pass-through card (which is what's always been expected), but with the benefits of an all-in-one package. It's difficult to wholeheartedly recommend the Stingray, though, given its potential compatibility troubles. The best recommendation we can give is to check it out, but make sure you have a money-back guarantee in case you have to return it to the store. (Hercules; 800-323-0601;www.hercules.com; street $249) —*Rob Smith*

KDS VS-19

RATING: B-

I've known about KDS' VS-19 for some time now and have been eagerly awaiting the new, inexpensive, 19-inch screen with a street price of $899. So far, KDS has been delivering 17-inch monitors that perform every bit as solidly as flat-screens from competitors such as Mag and Optiquest. Sadly, the VS-19 had to scrimp someplace, and that place was in its "classic" rounded CRT.

Two years ago, rounded viewing edges and a concave tube wouldn't have been an issue. But with the recent proliferation of flat tubes, consumer expectations have risen, and the VS-19's CRT has a hard time keeping up. Don't get me wrong: The VS-19 has a great display, with excellent clarity, color saturation, and sharpness out to the edges. It's just those rounded edges. True, the screen has 18.8 inches of viewing area, but since the tube isn't squared off, you can't extend your image area in Windows 95 out as far as with a flat screen. Considering the old-fashioned nature of concave tubes, the VS-19 will likely leave potential buyers with the feeling that they're settling for less—not a good thing with gamers who want their significant purchases to elicit "wows" and envy from friends and adversaries. The case and desk footprint will also likely give consumers pause: Both are huge compared to those of other 19-inch and 20-inch monitors on the market today.

At least for the time being, this size category's standard of excellence remains Hitachi's CM751U. KDS deserves praise for coming to play with a low street price designed to broaden the market, and if you have to have a lot of screen area on a tight budget, the VS-19 won't let you down. The image quality, 1600-by-1200 maximum resolution, 95KHz maximum refresh rate, generous three-year warranty, and no-argument replacement policies make this monitor a solid value for the money. But in the all-important ego-boost category, the VS-19 lags behind a few notches. (KDS; 800-283-1311; www.kdsusa.com; street $899)

—*George T. Chronis*

Canopus Pure3D

RATING: A

Already well known for its Total 3D board—arguably the best Rendition board around—Canopus is jumping onto the 3Dfx bandwagon. Surprisingly, though, it chose to build a board around the 3Dfx Voodoo Graphics chip instead of the Rush—which is good, considering some games

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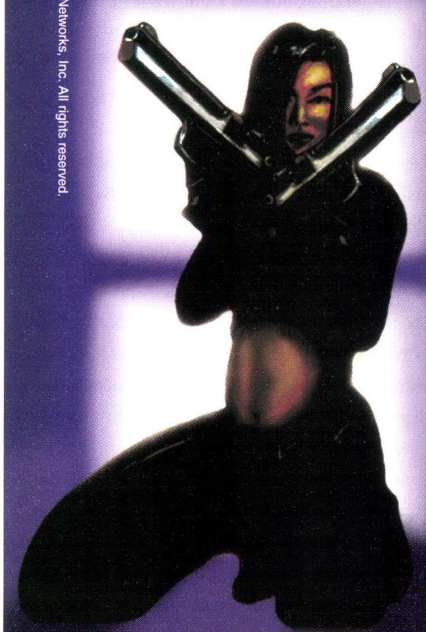

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Canopus has been assimilated into the 3Dfx camp.

out there actually don't run on the Rush. But unlike other 3Dfx boards, it's also got 6MB of memory, 4MB dedicated to textures. And it's the only Voodoo Graphics board to feature a TV-out feature, which is kind of cool if you can take advantage of it.

All of the 3Dfx games I tried, like GLHexen II, GLQuake, MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries 3Dfx Edition, and others, worked beautifully. And, having a little more texture memory than other boards, it allowed those games to run at around 25 frames per second on a lower-end machine than my usual P150. Every Direct3D game I threw at it also performed up to expectation. To date, Voodoo boards are probably the only ones capable of running all Direct3D games with few problems.

Like other Voodoo Graphics cards, the Pure3D is strictly a 3D board, and you need to plug it into your existing 2D board for it to work. The software bundle on this was nonexistent, though. The folks at Canopus believe that the gamers who buy this card are likely to already own the games they want to play, so they'd rather keep the price down. If you're in that camp, this is the best pass-through Voodoo graphics board on the market today. (Canopus; 888-868-2533; www.canopuscorp.com; street $159)

—Chris Tou

KDS VS-21 Monitor

RATING: B

Can you go wrong with a 21-inch monitor? Well, I suppose you could, but it's hard to see how if it's made with any kind of quality. Gamers should want a Texas-sized picture for visual grazing.

Given that, you should find the KDS VS-21 just fine for your gaming needs.

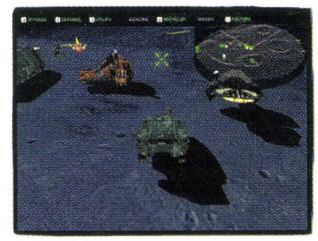
Maybe it's the psychology of the slightly larger size, because in most physical respects, the VS-21 is virtually identical to its cousin, the VS-19 (see review in this section). You get a little more viewable area—19.9 inches to the VS-19's 18.8 inches—but its footprint is exactly the same. So is its ability to handle resolutions up to 1600-by-1200 at 85kHz. So is its general picture crispness and color handling.

The VS-21's an improvement over the 19-inch model in one nice respect, though: the flat-screen display doesn't have the VS-19's jarring roundness. However, it does distort the picture slightly at the edges. We found that a Netscape window got its top corner clipped at full-screen. It's not a huge problem, mind you, but small things matter in a big monitor.

Aside from that, setup was a relative breeze: plug-and-play detected the monitor with no hiccups, and although we lacked a KDS-specific driver, it was easily available on the KDS Web site. Our 2D- and 3D-accelerated games looked just fine, too. As long as your action isn't up in the corners, VS-21 will be worthy of your gaming needs. (KDS; 800-283-1311; www.kdsusa.com; street $1,299)

—Don St. John

In this case, bigger is better.



Optiquest breaks the $1,000 big-screen barrier.

Optiquest V95

RATING: A-

Let's face it: Most gamers are guys, and guys have an obsession with large things. You know the big three—big screens, big cars, big…OK, we won't go there. But big monitors definitely are on the minds of gamers these days as prices continue to drop and image quality gets better. That's definitely the case with Optiquest's new V95 19-inch monitor.

The V95's super-fine .26 dot pitch produces crisp, clear images on a respectable 18-inch viewing area. When I revved up a beta version of Need for Speed II: SE with 3Dfx support, there was no doubt about it—this monitor added a lot to my gameplay experience. I really felt like I was in an arcade. The V95 comes with a special anti-static, anti-glare screen treatment that retracts light from the user without compromising image quality. This allowed me to play for hours without feeling any eyestrain during daylight or into the wee hours of the morning (don't tell my girlfriend).

At its highest 1280-by-1024 and 1600-by-1280 resolutions, refresh rates of up to 88kHz are supported, ensuring flicker-free displays. Setup and installation are also truly plug-and-play. The included On View digital controls make adjustment of size, position, and geometry easy for optimal game viewing. With a street price of $995, the V95 gives you the advantages of a conventional 20-inch with the cost of a high-end 17-inch. This monitor is a perfect fit on our list of obsessions—well, at least my list. (Optiquest; 800-888-8583; www.viewsonic.com; street $995)

—Marcale Wallace

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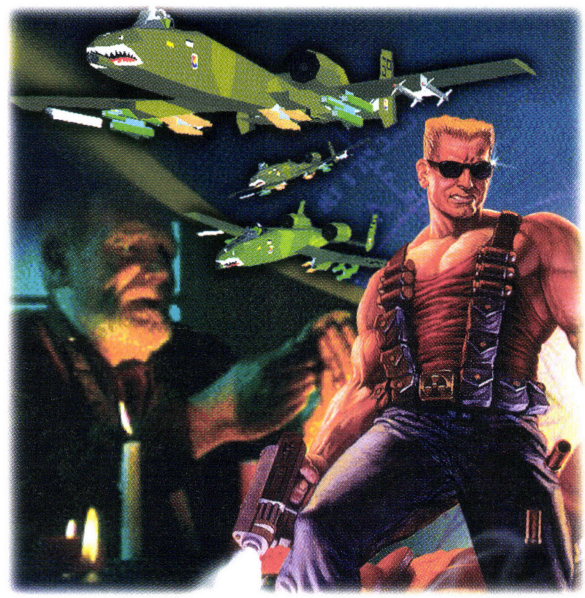
Missing files, modem upgrades, error messages—no problem!

By Patrick Marshall

Q This summer, I was deleting stuff and accidentally deleted my Config.sys, Autoexec.bat, and Command.com files. My dad and I thought that maybe it was time to upgrade to Windows 95, so we did. Now I notice that my Config.sys and Autoexec.bat are empty! When I reboot to DOS, I don't get my CD-ROM driver. I tried typing MSCDEX.EXE, but it gives me "mscdex [/d/e/f/g/h/i/j/k] [/d:<driver>] [/m:<letters>]." I can't find the drivers to load up and don't even know if it's possible. Can you suggest how to find my CD-ROM drivers?

Dustin Duran
Bellevue, WA

A *The Windows 95 installation itself didn't do anything to your drivers, but unless you select the dual-boot option—which allows you to boot to either DOS or Win 95—you'll lose the contents of your Autoexec.bat and Config.sys files when you install Win 95. The error message you're getting results from the fact that MSCDEX won't load unless you tell it in the command line where to find the appropriate driver for the CD-ROM drive. The simplest way to get things back to normal is to reinstall the software that came with the CD-ROM. If you don't have that anymore, contact the maker of your CD-ROM, or just search for the manufacturer's Web page, since many peripherals manufacturers make their drivers freely available on their Web sites.*



Q I recently upgraded from a 14.4 modem to a 33.6 generic brand (internal) modem. My problem is that I have call waiting, and since I changed modems, incoming calls can't get through. With my 14.4 modem, if I was online or playing a game and someone called, it came through. Now the phone just rings and rings and rings. Do you know of a way I can avoid losing calls?

Paul Craig
Via email

A *I can't imagine how you were managing to get a voice call through on the same line while you had a modem connection established, unless you're using an ISDN line. In fact, the biggest problem with call waiting is that it interrupts modem transmissions. That's why it's a good idea to disable call waiting when you start an online session. You do this by adding a special code to the beginning of the phone number you're dialing. The code, however, varies from one area to the next, so you should check your phone book for the appropriate one. There is another, more elegant solution on the way, though. A new product—Internet Call Manager service from InfoInterActive—was introduced in Canada this summer. If you subscribe to this service (for around $7 per month), when a call comes in while you're online, a message will pop up on your screen with caller-identification information. You can then instruct the program to play a message to the caller asking them to call back soon. Or, you can play a message promising to call them back, or ignore them altogether. The call gets forwarded to InfoInterActive, where the caller receives the appropriate message. Of course, if you're paying $7 per month for the service—as well as several dollars each month for Caller ID and call forwarding—suddenly the idea of adding a separate phone line starts to look more attractive.*

Q I have a 486/66 IBM Aptiva with a double-speed CD-ROM, 550MB of hard-drive space, Windows 3.11, and DOS 6.22. The problem is that when I try to run games such as Zork: Nemesis, Duke Nukem 3D, FX Fighter, and a bunch of other games, I get an error message saying "EMM386 HAS DETECTED ERROR #12." My computer then automatically reboots. I can't get it to stop, even using the Memmaker utility.

robotron
Via email

A *This kind of error is generally caused by an application or device driver that gives the CPU an invalid instruction. Obviously, the first thing to do is to try and determine why the program or driver is being naughty. Here's how:*

First, disable EMM386 by inserting "REM" before the line in the Config.sys file that activates EMM386. Disabling EMM386 sometimes causes the misbehaving program to generate a more specific error message. Second, try changing the order in which device drivers and memory-resident programs are loaded. Third, add the following command to your Config.sys file:

STACKS=18,512

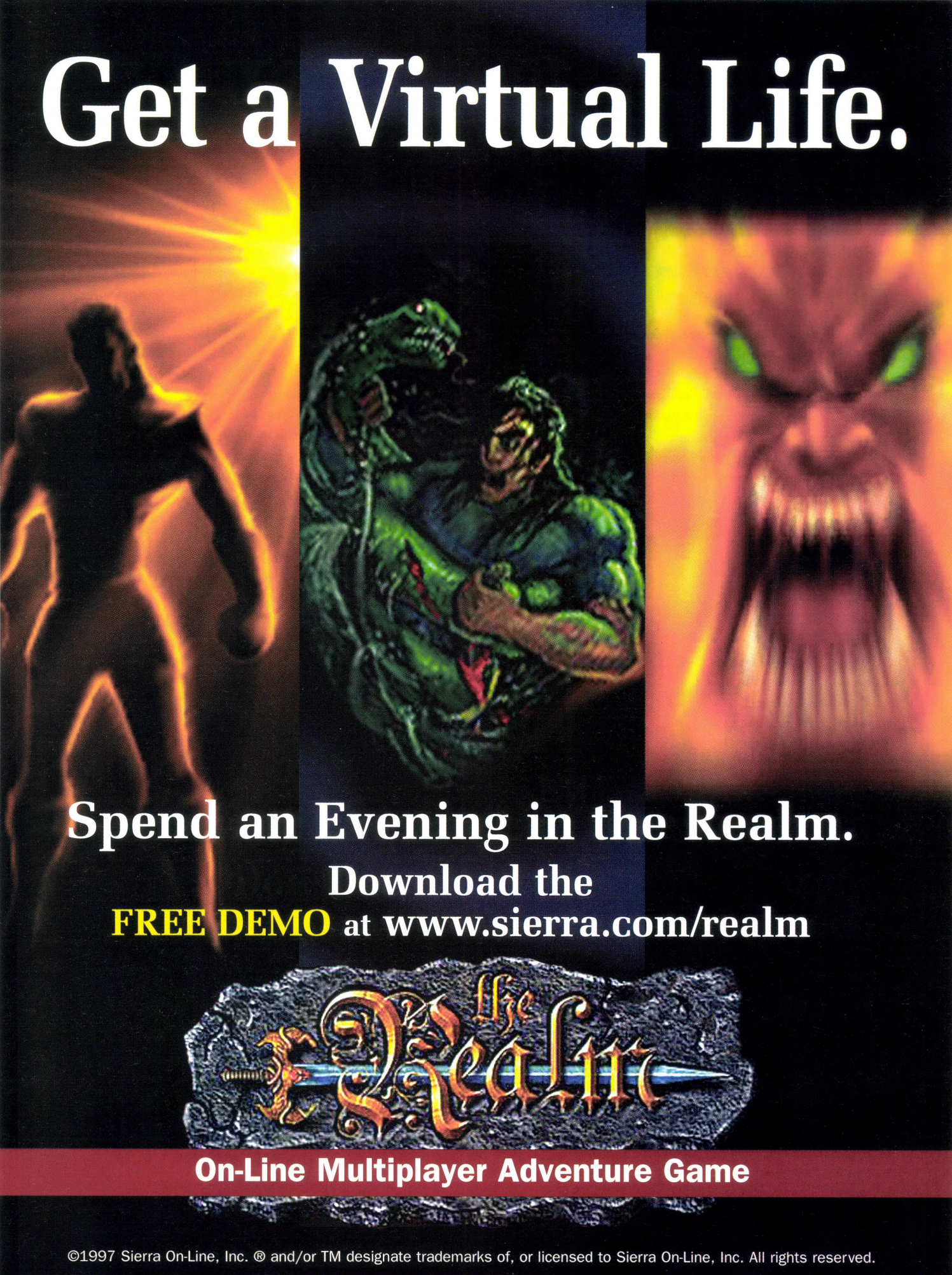
Finally, since the error occurs whenever you load CD games, it seems likely that the culprit is your CD driver. Check to see if there's an updated driver available. Actually, you may want to use this problem as an excuse to upgrade to a faster drive altogether.

Q Is there a way to clean up the Add/Remove box in the Control Panel? I deleted a program that had its own uninstall system, and its name is still haunting my Add/Remove box.

Kevin Dunn
Via email

A *There is a way, but you'll have to edit the Windows Registry. Before doing so, make sure to create a backup copy so that you can return things to where you started if your editing introduces any surprises.*

Here's what to do: Using Windows Explorer, go to the Windows directory. Make backup copies of



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two files: System.dat and User.dat. Then double-click on Regedit.exe. This will load the Registry Editor. In the Registry Editor, go to HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Uninst, and you'll see a list of all programs that appear in the Add/Remove Programs utility. Delete the program you don't want, then exit the Registry.

Q I have a P75 CPU on my motherboard. I'm considering an overdrive chip, but a recent *PC Games* article (Technobabble, July/August) says that this will only boost my performance to 125MHz. When I checked my motherboard manual, it said it was overdrive-compatible, and it also listed the CPU processor speeds that it was capable of handling. It says my motherboard supports 3.3v Intel Pentium 75/50 MHz, 90/60 MHz, and 100/66 MHz CPUs. In the section on adding an overdrive chip, it explains how to do it. Then it says to ensure all jumpers are set properly, lists a number of jumpers, and lists jumpers for CPU frequencies, with different clock speeds from 75MHz to 120MHz. This leads me to believe that I could purchase any overdrive chip compatible with 60MHz to 100MHz Pentium chips and it'd work, provided I set the appropriate jumpers. Is this true?

Leonard Kozel
Via email

A *You are correct. Intel is marketing its MMX Overdrive chips to consumers who may not feel secure switching jumper settings on their motherboards, as was mentioned in the article. But if that's a no-brainer for you, you can buy an overdrive CPU that will work with a speed setting you select. As for non-overdrive CPUs, if you want to know if your system will support a particular processor, there's more to consider than clock speeds and voltage. Even if your motherboard allows you to change these settings, the system BIOS may not support a particular CPU upgrade, and you may be able to get an updated BIOS from the maker of your computer. In any event, the only way to be sure your system will work with the new chip—apart from buying the chip and seeing what happens—is to check with the manufacturer. You may also want to check Intel's Web site for a compatibility list, at* **www.intel.com.**

Q I just upgraded my computer from an old 386 to a much faster P100 with 32MB of RAM. Along with the upgrade, I replaced almost everything on the computer, including the video card and the operating system. I spent way too much on a Matrox Millennium with 4MB of onboard RAM and a copy of Windows 95. My problem? Almost every game I look at or want to buy requires DirectX technology. But the Millennium doesn't seem to support DirectX.

To top it off, when I called Matrox, they made it seem as if there were no plans to create the drivers needed to run DirectX. The really strange part of my story, and the reason I'm writing, is this: I was fooling around with a copy of Battleship and a copy of A10 Cuba!—both of which require DirectX 2.0—and I was able to get them up on the screen, although I'm not sure why. In the documentation for both games there were HUGE boldface warnings, telling me my video card wouldn't support the games. What gives? Am I missing out on some really cool element of gameplay because I have this card? Do I need to look into getting a new video card? If so, what do I do with the one I have? Is there a way to get Matrox to make the drivers I need?

Tim Elhajj
Via email

A *Don't worry, Tim. Despite the warning, most games that employ DirectX will work just fine with the Matrox Millennium. With DirectX, certain screen-drawing operations are performed by chips on your graphics adapter instead of through software that draws pixel by pixel. The fact is, the Millennium supports some—but not all—of the 3D functions in hardware that DirectX encompasses. While the Millennium supports such operations as gouraud shading, Z-buffering, and double buffering, for example, it doesn't support polygon fogging. Technobabble? Maybe. But the end result is that the Millennium will give you most of the speed boost offered by DirectX.*

Q I am running an AMD 586/133 and Windows 95. Windows, however, will not recognize my processor as 586, reporting it instead as a 486. Certain games such as Destruction Derby 2 and a number of others, along with many software packages, won't install because my computer reports itself as a 486/133. Most of these programs require only a P75 or P100, and I've been told my processor is sufficient to run them. Do you know any way to make Win 95 accept my processor as a 586?

Ryan Montgomery
Via email

A *Windows reports your processor as a 486 because it IS a 486. The AMD 586 was named that because the company felt it delivered Pentium-like performance. But the AMD 586 is really a 486DX4/133. True, the AMD processor has been enhanced with a 16K onboard cache instead of the 8K cache on the Intel 486. But the AMD 586 is nevertheless a 486 processor.*

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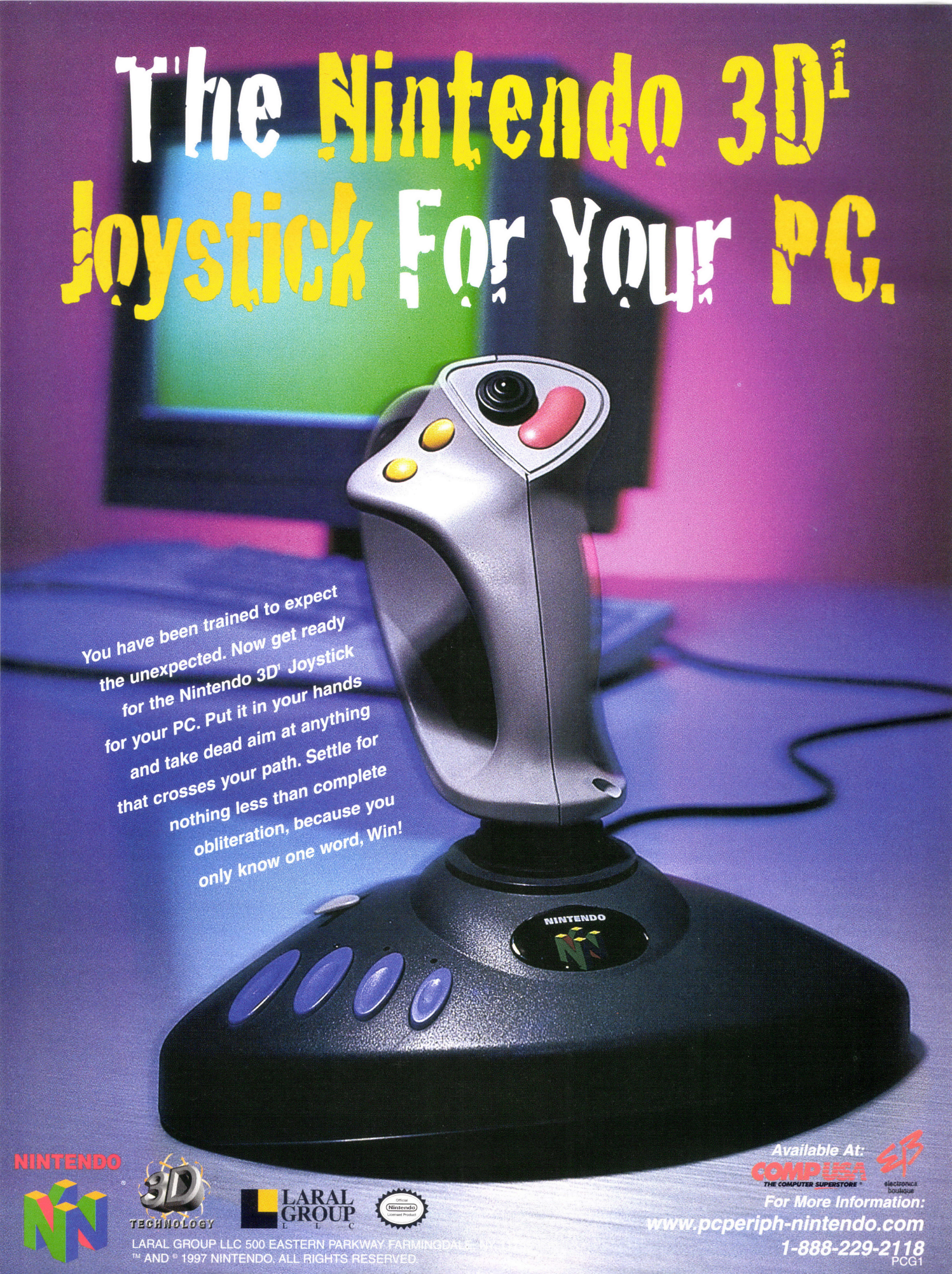

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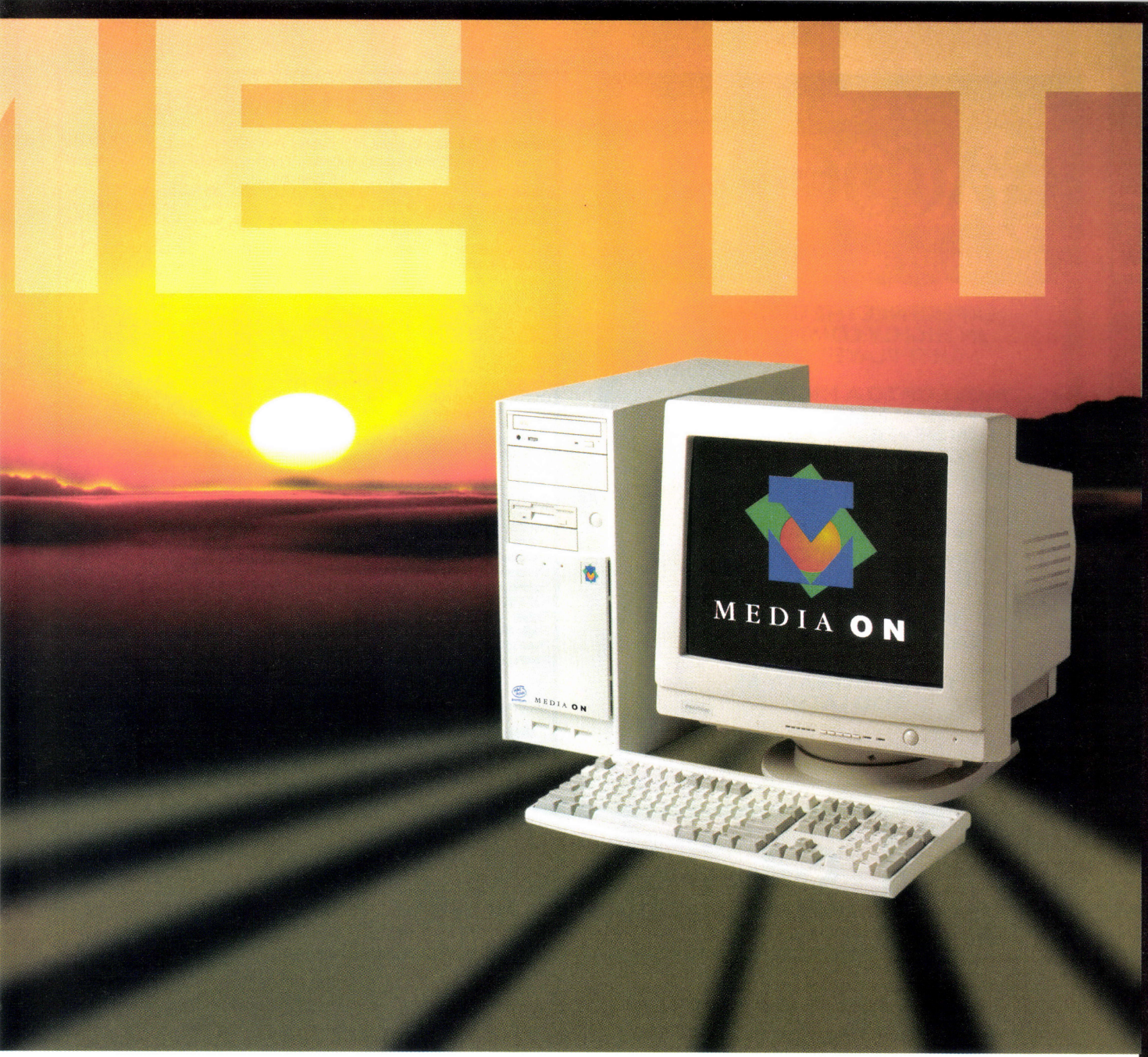

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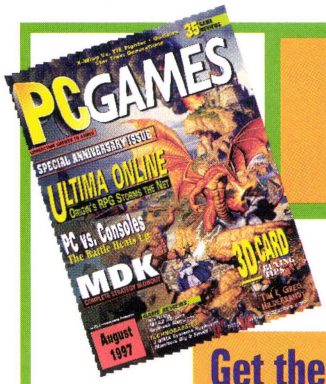

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81,83	SegaSoft	800-743-2725	Vigilance
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FACE-OFF

Saving Games: Wuss or Warrior?

Blade *Wirehead*

You're hammering away through the latest first-person shooter/strategy-game/RPG/whatever, and you stop to save midway through the current level. Are you a total wimp? Blade thinks so in stern **bold**, while Wirehead says "no problem" in measured *italics*.

It's quite simple: allowing players to save a game at any point takes away a great deal of the challenge, tension, work, and, finally, sense of achievement in completing a game (or even just a level). What's the fun in that?

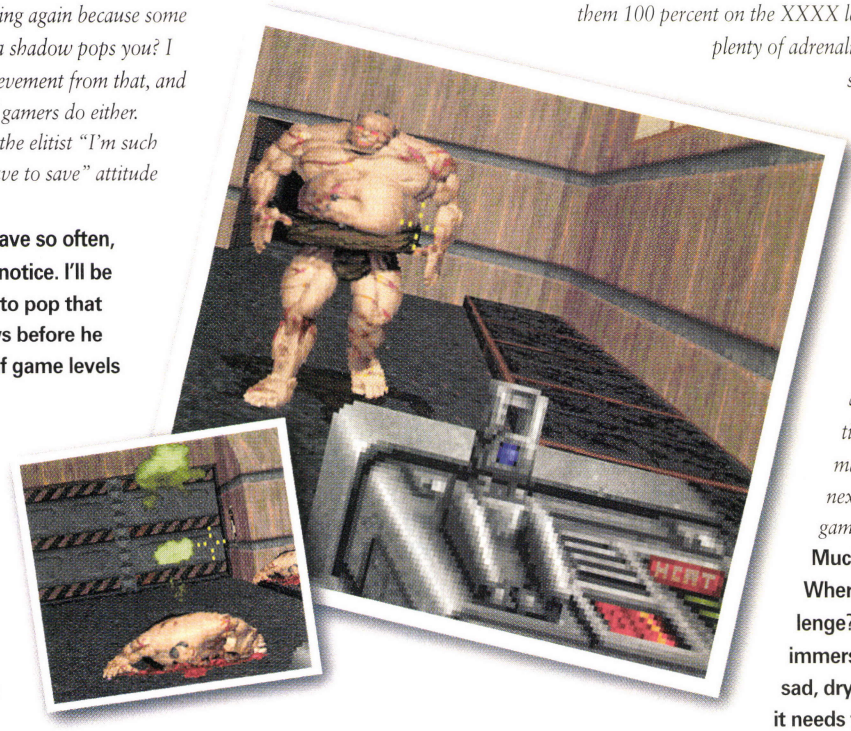
The answer to that is its own question: What's the fun in getting through nine-tenths of a level, only to have to slog through the whole thing again because some guy you didn't see sitting in a shadow pops you? I don't get much sense of achievement from that, and I don't think the majority of gamers do either. Then again, they don't have the elitist "I'm such a great gamer that I don't have to save" attitude that you're infected with.

Okay, so I don't need to save so often, but that's because I take notice. I'll be quick and aware enough to pop that guy sitting in the shadows before he can do any damage. But if game levels are designed with sufficient care, attention, and balance, progression isn't the lottery that you suggest it is—it's a challenge to your skills. MDK is the finest case in point: Without the save-game feature (a very late addition), every health point counted, and every bullet needed to be carefully conserved. That wasn't the case once you could save at any point. Dark Forces was a huge challenge because you couldn't save mid-mission, but it was compelling enough to complete. Lucas has caved in with Jedi Knight—won't that take some challenge away?

Granted, no saving is the ultimate purist challenge. I'm not going to harangue someone who wants to play this way as indulging some sort of samurai ritual—more power to him. But you're implying that it's unworthy to save as you go, that gamers are dolts for not being "quick and aware enough to pop that guy sitting in the shadows." That's not the case. Key word? Fun. Save-as-you-go means everybody who plays—including real young kids and older players who may not have your killer reflexes—can have fun with a game, which makes games more desirable to buy and play, which means the industry lives long and prospers. Your way would have us all—developers, retailers, and magazine writers—selling apples on the street corner in no time.

Wrong. Why? Because it's too easy to save and get through tricky areas of a game. All gamers, myself included, will take the easy way out given the chance. Saving at the end of a mission or level is fine. But if you could save in the middle of a Conquest Earth mission, you'd lose the adrenaline rush of scraping through with just two units (obviating the need to struggle through the whole thing again)—and that's much more *fun* than your lame-ass way out.

That's the pompous attitude of someone who gets paid to sit and play games all day. Other people have lives, you know. And they might not want to spend them 100 percent on the XXXX level of Shadow Warrior. I get plenty of adrenaline rush beating one boss, saving so I don't have to have him farting green gas at me again, and moving on to the next adrenaline rush around the corner. There's nothing lame-ass about it: I beat him with whatever it takes, I savor the fun as completely as anyone else, and I move on with satisfaction in my soul and a malevolent attitude toward the next bad guy. And I'm no less a gamer—or person—for it.



Much less of a person. Where's your soul for the challenge? When games are now so immersive and compulsive, it's a sad, dry, '90s attitude that dictates it needs to be done now. Not after a few sweaty moments, but now. Take up the challenge as it was intended, and if the game balance is right, you'll get a greater rush from it. And I'd only see the farting green gas once—his ass would be fried the first time we met. Keep practicing and saving, if that's the only way you can win.

One last time: It's still a fine challenge if you save. No loss of soul, face, personhood, or fun. The game police won't come and arrest players who go this route. So, gentle readers, look into your mirrors and repeat after Wirehead: "I'm a good gamer, and it's OK if I save along the way. Really."

Or look in the mirror and say "I can't finish. I'm not worthy."

Blade is busy saving the world without even stopping for a beer, while Wirehead savors those fine moments spent sipping single-malt Scotch between kills.

ILLUSTRATION BY BRUCE GARDNER

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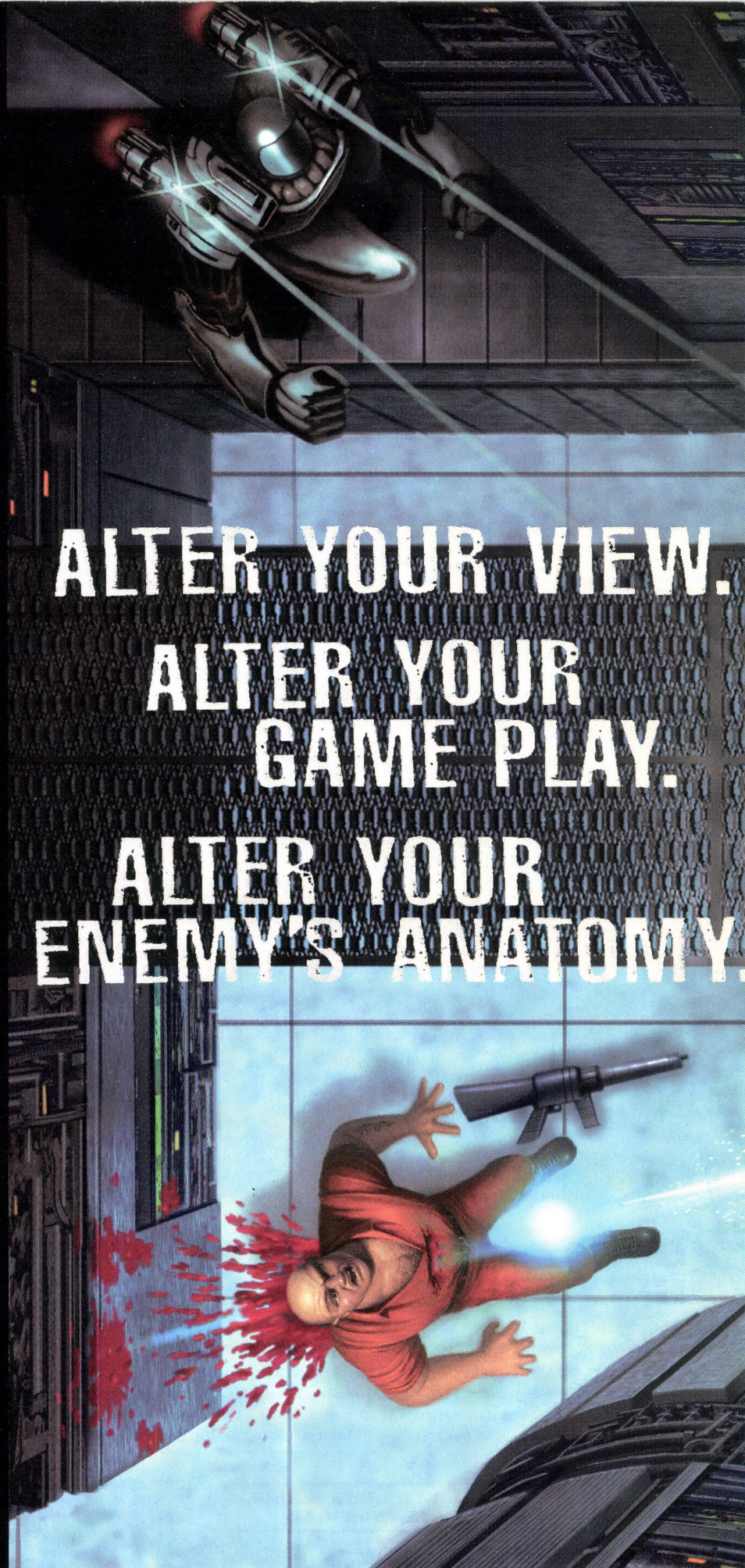

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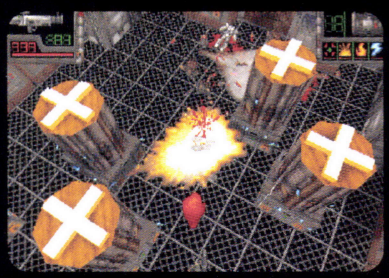

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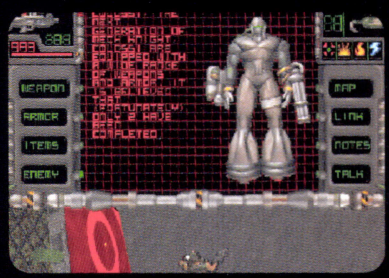

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